[Frontispiece]

The Saramacca River below the Mamadam falls.

(Frontispiece)

REBEL DESTINY

Among the Bush Negroes of Dutch Guiana

BY

MELVILLE J. HERSKOVITS

AND

FRANCES S. HERSKOVITS

[P. iii]

[Title Page]

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To
ELSIE CLEWS PARSONS

[P. v]

Preface

THE pages that follow describe scenes in the lives of 195
a Negro people living in isolation in the interior of
Dutch Guiana, South America. These Negroes are [144]
the descendants of runaway slaves imported from Africa, who took refuge in the dense Guiana bush and established African villages along the rivers whose rapids are their fortifications. The end of the seventeenth century already found these Negroes in constantly growing numbers up the Suriname River, and before the middle of the next century they were sufficiently organized to make repeated raids on the plantations for guns and gunpowder, for machetes and women. Several campaigns were conducted against them, but eventually final treaties were concluded with the Dutch owners of the colony, which guaranteed them their freedom. Today when a Bush Negro drinks with a white man his toast is "Free!"

Three tribal groups go to make up this Bush Negro 101
population. The Saramacca tribe, of whom we write, is 619
found in the heart of the colony along the upper reaches of the Suriname River (called by the Bush Negroes the "Saramacca," and hence so named in this book), and farther south along the Gran Rio and the Pikien Rio. This tribe has had the least contact with outside influences, and it is the Saramacca language which differs most from that spoken by the Negroes of the coastal region. The second is the Awka tribe, found mainly along the Marowyne (Maroni) River, which forms the boundary between French and Dutch Guiana; there are in addition several Awka villages on the lower Suriname. The third tribe, the Boni,

[p. vi is blank]

101 is relatively small, and is localized in the interior of French
619 Guiana, not far from the Dutch boundary. In any consideration of the Guiana Negroes, yet a fourth group must be kept in mind—that of the Negroes of the coastal region, who remained enslaved until their emancipation in 1865.

989 The country of the Saramacca people is reached from Paramaribo, the capital and port of the colony of Suriname (Dutch Guiana), by the weekly train which goes some ninety-five miles to Kabel, where the railway meets the river. From Kabel transportation into the far interior is by dugout canoe, owned and manned by Saramacca men.
133 The country above Kabel, which the Saramacca people call the "big bush," is jungle. Over the watershed lie the Amazon basin and the forests of northern Brazil. Once in this region, the traveler has no contact with European civilization, though he is still under the protection of the Dutch Government.

121 The picture which we draw of the Saramacca people is
114 based upon two field trips to Dutch Guiana, undertaken in the summers of 1928 and 1929. During our second trip we traversed the entire stretch of the Saramacca country from below Kabel, where the Awka villages are located, to the last native habitation on the Pikien Rio, beyond which are some fields, then uninhabitated miles of wilderness to the Brazilian border.

The ethnological work conducted among the Saramacca tribe of Bush Negroes and the Negroes of the coastal region of Suriname represents a portion of an investigation into the physical and cultural characteristics of the Negroes of the New World. This research, which is still in progress, has included field work in the United States, in Dutch Guiana, and in Africa, and some comparative study in the islands of the Caribbean. It began in 1923 with an inquiry into Negro-white crossing in the United States.[1] As the work progressed it became evident that the problem

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[1] For the results of this portion of the investigation, see M. J. Herskovits, "The American Negro, a Study in Racial Crossing" (1928); and "The Anthropometry of the American Negro" (1930).

demanded more knowledge of the sources of the slaves 121
who compose the Negro ancestry of the American Negroes 114
than was available. This knowledge, which historical documents do not give us, was, therefore, to be sought in a comparison of Negro cultures in the New World and in Africa.

As the research was continued, moreover, it became apparent that the scientific problem of the Negro in the New World held implications of larger significance, and that the history of the Negro in the New World has constituted a vast "laboratory" experiment in the processes of racial mixture and of cultural contacts. The Negroes who were brought to the New World came of various West African stocks, and here they mingled their blood with the English, the French, the Dutch, with the Danish, Spanish, and Portuguese who became their masters, and they absorbed in varying degrees the culture of these masters. At the same time, they came in contact with aboriginal Indian peoples with whom they also mingled. But the Negro has not only absorbed; he has also given. The conclusion, still held by many students, that the Negro slave came to this country a savage child with or without his loin cloth, and as naked culturally as he was sartorially, is one which cannot today be accepted.

At the beginning of our field work in Suriname, one of us 121
went up the Suriname River to study the Bush Negroes, and the other remained in Paramaribo to collect folk lore from the town Negroes and to ascertain what Africanisms could be discerned in their beliefs and behavior. When we met and compared notes, some striking things came to light, for bush and town Negroes were, as the evidence in hand suggested, much more closely allied culturally than had been realized, while both were seen to have many aspects of culture that clearly link them with West African and other New World Negroes.

Thus, in bush and town, the Negroes hold the same 776
concept and offer the same explanations of the soul and 171

776 171 its influence on the life of man, and both employ the word *akra* for soul, a word used on the Gold Coast of Africa exactly as it is in Guiana. The day names associated with the soul are Gold Coast day names, known in Jamaica and heard in the United States, as well. In the bush the Saramacca people are "possessed" by the gods and by *obia;* in the town the Negroes are "possessed" by *winti*, a word meaning wind, and the use of wind as a euphemism for the gods is common in Dahomey and Ashanti. Many of the gods of both bush and town are the same, and they are African gods, invoked today in Nigeria, in Dahomey, in Togo, in Ashanti, and invoked also in the islands of the Caribbean. *Nyankompon*, the Bush Negro name for the Sky God, is the Gold Coast name. The Maroons of Jamaica know this deity under the same designation. *Dagowe* is a snake god in the Suriname bush and in town—the Haitians and Dahomeans dance to the same snake god, whom they call *Dangbe*. In West Africa the silk-cotton and *loko* trees are sacred. In the Saramacca villages and in the town of Parimaribo they are sacred as well, and the names are Dahomean names, known also in Haiti. In bush and town the people dance to the river gods, as do the Negroes in Africa and the Caribbean, and the pattern of the ceremonies has been preserved in part in Negro baptismal rites in the United States. Bush and town invoke the buzzard, *Opete*, so named in Ashanti, and sacred everywhere in West Africa, and the style of dancing resembles certain of the dances of the "saints" who "shout" in the Negro Sanctified Churches of the United States.

342 171 Between bush and town there is, however, this difference—the bush is Africa of the seventeenth century. In West Africa today, for example, the roof of thatch has almost everywhere given way to the white man's metal roofing. In Dahomey, where thatch is still found, we discovered a strip of wall made of woven palm fronds, such as is found on the Saramacca, in a village which had been enslaved by the Dahomean kings in the early seventeenth century and had remained enslaved until the conquest

of the Dahomean kingdom by the French. All other walls 342
are of swish. Today in West Africa the automobile and 171
sewing machine have found their way into remote corners.
But more important still than these changes wrought by 199
European civilizations, which have made inroads chiefly
on the material life of the Africans, are those resulting from
intertribal wars, which followed the introduction of guns
and gunpowder into Africa and which helped to establish
the great West African dynasties. The result of the conquest
of one native people by another was constant cultural
interstimulation which made for changes in the indigenous
civilizations.

In the Guiana bush, however, where these runaway Negroes and their descendants have been living, the fortunes of African kingdoms, the cultural contacts that have affected the Africans, have not touched their own tribal destinies. Neither has the civilization of the white man nor that of the Indian introduced basic changes into their manner of living or thinking.

There are no roads in the Guiana bush, and what foot- 487
paths exist to connect one village with another are difficult
to follow and, moreover, are not for the stranger, whether
he be white or mulatto. For such as these the highway is
the river, with native paddlers alert in their surveillance
of a stranger's activities. The old men on the river have
made a tradition of recalling the struggle of the ancestors
for freedom and survival, and it is not without significance
that one of the three worst crimes among the Bush Ne- [683]
groes—one that ranks with incest and murder—is informing on a Negro to a white man.

In contrast with this isolation of the Bush Negroes, the 648
Negroes of Paramaribo have known close contact with
the whites, with Carib and Arawak Indians, and in more
recent years with the Hindu and Javanese laborers brought
to the colony. Only suggestions of the manner in which the 184
beliefs of town and bush correspond or differ can be included
here, since this account concerns itself with the Saramacca
people. Yet for the understanding of this study it must be

184 emphasized that whatever the differences, much of Africa remains in the coastal region. Thus, to cite an instance, at a winti dance in Paramaribo one night, the drummers were grumbling about the slowness with which possession was coming on. At last the priestess, possessed by *Lebba*, the Nigerian-Dahomean god of the crossroads, began to dance. Whereupon an elderly drummer flung up his hands and cried out, "Praise God, idolatry is not dead yet!" The word he used for idolatry was Dutch, and he pronounced it in Negro-English, *afkodrai*.

121 The importance of the Bush Negroes for the student of Negro cultures, then, is that they live and think today as did their ancestors who established themselves in this bush, which is to say that they live and think much as did the Negroes who were brought to other parts of the New World, and who became the ancestors of the New World Negroes of the present day.

In planning this book, therefore, it has seemed more important to stress the Bush Negro's attitudes toward his own civilization, and his own logic in explaining his customs, than to give a more conventional description of an integrated village or the tribal life of a primitive people. Such attitudes, moreover, whether analyzed among Negroes in Africa, Guiana, the Caribbean, or in the United States, can be studied most advantageously when they are juxtaposed against the factor of outsiders—in this case ourselves, a man and a woman, who came as friendly whites.

114 This book, however, is not an ethnographic treatise. The scientific discussion of these data will appear in monographic form, while the correspondences between bush and town Negroes, and between these and other Negro groups found in the New World, are included in a memoir on the folk lore of the town Negroes of Paramaribo which is now in press. The situations to which we have given emphasis are those which have a direct bearing upon the beliefs and practices of Negro peoples wherever they are found today, but they are presented as they would—and did—actually

occur among the Saramacca people. Nothing has been included either in descriptive detail, in the spoken or unspoken thoughts attributed to a Bush Negro, or in characterization, which has not been given us by our Bush Negro informants or has not been witnessed by ourselves. If the thoughts of Moana Yankuso or of any of the elders who figure in the book seem sophisticated when contrasted with the simplicity of the material life of the Bush Negroes, then it is because the stereotype of the childlike, carefree Negro has been so widely accepted. The subtlety and astuteness of a man like Moana Yankuso, or of Sedefo, our chief paddler and the right-hand man of Yankuso's strongest rival, or of Apanto, the sorcerer, cannot be too emphatically stated. 114 [121]

In view of the political factions on the river, and our concern lest these make capital of the fact that a village had been generous in the confidences given the whites, several villages do not appear under their own names. For Headman Moana Yankuso was an old man when we visited him, and alliances for the succession to his high office were at that time already being formed, alliances which, since his death some three years ago, have undoubtedly been consolidated and made effective for the time when his successor is to be named. Villages, therefore, are in some instances given the names of rapids in the river, and not necessarily the names of the rapids found nearest to the villages of which we are writing. In this manner we have sought to preserve the anonymity of the villages without violating the authenticity of place names. Men and women, as well, with the exception of the priestess Amasina, Moana Yankuso, his daughter Wilhelmina, the bassia of his village, Bibifo, and the Captains of Baikutu, S'ei, and Dahomey do not appear under their own names, but under other typical Saramacca Negro names. 114 123

Work of the type we have attempted cannot be accomplished without the cooperation of many persons, and we are privileged to acknowledge here our gratitude to those 000

000 who have helped us. To Professor Franz Boas and Dr. Elsie Clews Parsons, whose interest and scholarly advice have stimulated work on this problem; to Dr. Parsons, the Columbia University Council for Research in the Social Sciences, and Northwestern University, for the financial support that allowed us to make the field trips on the results of which we base this book; to His Excellency, Dr. H. H. Rutgers, Governor of Suriname and the Honorable F. J. L. Van Haaren, Attorney-General of the colony, and their staffs of officials, for their generous cooperation; to Dr. Morton C. Kahn, to whom we owe our initiation into life in the tropics and many memories of congenial travel together; to Mr. A. C. van Lier, Mr. R. M. Schmidt, Mme. Gay Schneiders-Howard, and above all, Mr. Alexander Woolf, at whose balata station we made our base camp, for their great help in making contacts for us with the natives with whom we worked; to Mr. Irving Breger, who in making the illuminated map has so ably met the challenge of the Bush Negro artists; to the international body of scholars, especially Jhr. L. C. van Panhuys, Dr. Gerhard Lindblom, and the late Dr. H. D. Benjamins, whose writings afforded us a background and a starting point for our own studies; to all of these we wish to express our deepest appreciation. The first thanks of any ethnologist, however, must be to the native informants and friends who have given him his material, and it is with regret that, except in the case of that remarkable personality, the late Headman Moana Yankuso, we must acknowledge our indebtedness to these Saramacca friends without naming them. We do so out of the regard we have for them, and in recognition of the manner in which life is lived in the bush. Our gratitude to them is not the less lively because we do not name them individually.

Melville J. Herskovits.
Frances S. Herskovits.

Evanston, Illinois,
March, 1934.

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REBEL DESTINY

Among the Bush Negroes of Dutch Guiana

Chapter I

DEATH AT GANKWE

WE HAD not thought to come upon death on our 761 first night in the Suriname bush. What had killed Sedefo's brother no one could as yet say, for the time had not come to call upon the spirit of the dead man to speak. Death, said the Bush Negroes, was ravaging the family. Kunu, the law of retribution, the tool of ancestors and gods, had found this latest victim an easy prey to the [154] black magic which had been invoked against him. In whispers they talked about a quarrel at work with a man who had a powerful snake god.

"The man's family kunu and the enemy's Aboma god," we heard as a refrain to the low muttering.

There would be dancing all that night for the spirit of 764 the dead, the natives told us, and they asked if we did not wish to come and honor the dead. But an old man objected. [609] "Let them wait until tomorrow," he said, "let them wait until they are rested. To face the spirit of the dead their own spirits must be strong."

That night whenever we stirred in our sleep we strained for the sound of the drums, but the wind blew from the east, and though Gankwe, where the dead man lay in state, was but a ten-minute run down the rapids, we could hear nothing. In the morning, however, we heard them plainly, heard the invocations drummed by the grave diggers on their way to the burial ground deep in the bush on the opposite bank.

Osio tintin [539]
Osio be'e dyo.

[P. 2 contain no textual material]

764 [539] "On the sacred apinti drum we speak to the spirit; we tell it we go to dig the grave." So the drum spoke. From the shore we could see five figures in the small corial, and, as they came closer, we saw also the drum, the food the men carried, and the muddy hoe. They would do this the next day and the next, for to dig a grave takes a long time.

I

775 769 191 Although separated by many generations from their African places of origin, the Bush Negroes of Dutch Guiana have held to the traditions and beliefs of their aboriginal home. In the Suriname bush, as in Africa, the responsibility which an individual bears toward his social group does not end with death. His clan, his village, and his family look to him, when he has joined the spirit of his ancestors, to protect them against the magic of their enemies, to help them in time of drought or pestilence and at all times to intercede for them with the gods.

As in Africa, the spirit of the dead is powerful for good or evil, and the rites of death must be carried out as tradition demands, so that the dead man may feel he has received honor among the living and proper introduction
764 191 to the world of the dead. As in Africa, we found that the first care for the dead is to place the body on the central portion of a broken canoe; that rum and tobacco are included in the water with which the body is washed; that in washing the dead, the back must not be touched; that the number of those who wash the body must not be
[801] an even one—five is the number preferred, though three persons are used, and seven; that those chosen must not be young, for it takes age and the knowledge of controlling the spirits which age brings to approach the dead without suffering harm.

764 While the body lies in the open house of the dead, relatives and the village elders are in attendance on the spirit night and day. It is they who all night tell stories about the trickster, spider Anansi, to amuse the spirit, and they who play traditional games. The dances begin when

the body has been put into the hexagonal cedar box which is ornamented with the cross-like design called by the natives *krse-oyo*, the eye of the coffin.

"How many days to make the coffin?" we asked our informant.

"One day only, but they do not start the first day. They must go into the bush and hunt out a cedar tree and cut it down, and then there must be prayers."

It became clear as we talked with this man, who so reluctantly spoke of these rites, that death cannot be hurried.

"It takes time," he said, "hammocks and cloths must be gathered, and other articles to put into the coffin. It takes time."

Before the body is put into the coffin, the ears and nostrils are packed with tobacco and cotton, and the head and face are swathed in white so that the dead man may be recognized when he walks abroad.

As we sat and talked of death, we heard the discharge of guns and were told that the coffin was being closed and that these shots were to honor the spirit. "They dance well at Gankwe," said our friend, casting an eye in the direction of the village and showing very plainly his eagerness to be off. But we detained him and brought the conversation back to the digging of the grave.

To dig a grave takes a long time, we heard again. The digging party first goes out to select a fitting place in the "big bush" where the dead lie. Though it is not considered imperative—some villages do not follow the practice at all—it is considered good form to consult the spirit of the dead man whether or not he approves of the spot chosen. Then all has to be done softly—*safri*—without haste. The men who go to dig the grave must be in the prime of life, for they must not tire easily, and even these strong young men must work slowly, that no drop of perspiration fall into the upturned earth. If one drop of perspiration were to fall into the grave, then the dead man would in time claim the companionship of the living spirit

764 775 of him from whom it had dropped. The same belief in the identification of the essence of one's being with any part of one's body which actuates so many primitive peoples, and [177] is so characteristic of West Africa, exists among the Bush Negroes. It is for this reason that when an African or a Bush Negro dies away from home some of his hair and nail parings are sent to his native village for ceremonial burial. And it is for this reason, too, that for three mornings we saw the party of five young men go out from Gankwe to dig the grave of Sedefo's brother and heard the drum's invocation,

[534]
Osio tintin
Osio be'e dyo.

2

776 796 The night was still and dark. The natives said the moon was dead and this was the time for the dances to the river gods, but since there was a death in Gankwe all the gods might be danced to, for in times of important rituals, like death or the breaking of mourning or harvest festivals, it was not necessary to wait for the day sacred to each god to dance.

"They dance well at Gankwe," said our informant, as he sat by, and then after listening for a few moments he added, "They're dancing already."

We, too, walked out on the path to listen, and gradually we separated the sound of the falls above our camp from what seemed like the pulse of the night itself.

"It doesn't boom, does it?" we asked each other, remembering the accounts of impressionable travelers.

Soon Sedefo himself appeared and another, and we started for Gankwe.

"*Waka koni*, Sedefo," called our host at camp as we put off. He was evidently uneasy about us and asked the paddlers to be careful, for it is not safe on the river at night with the rapids below and the spirits that hover about.

000 The paddles cut the water so soundlessly that it did seem as if the spirits were carrying the boat downstream.

DEATH AT GANKWE

Ahead of us and all about were the various shades of darkness which go to make the jungle darkness on a moonless night—the dark water, the dark branch of a liana which our paddlers skirted as if by magic, the dark wall of forest, and the dark horizon. But soon there was foam on the water, and then all the darkness seemed to break and come to life. We heard the drums plainly, and the rattles, the singing voices, and the chorus of approbation from the young onlookers, breaking into the song. We were nearing the rapids and Gankwe. 000

Up the bank, through the spiritual guard of palm fronds which stretched across the path, and up the path we went to the great village clearing, where the principal houses are grouped and where stands the house for the dead. 764

In this open palm-thatched house the coffin, covered over with a white striped cloth, rested on a rough bier. Underneath the head of the coffin a calabash dish stood to receive the fluid of the putrifying body, while in front of the coffin a fire smoldered and to one side a hammock was slung where Sedefo, or in his absence an elder of the village, lay to guard the dead. The drummers and some elders sat in front of the house facing the phalanx of singers seated on their low stools some ten feet away from them. There were perhaps fifty women singing, and as many standing about to the left ready to begin dancing again, or just standing by to mark the rhythm with hand clapping and a slight swaying in place. Here and there, hung upon forked sticks which had been planted in the ground or placed on the ground beside a stool, were a few lanterns. They cast a pale shadowy light and brought into relief the ceremonially oil-anointed shoulder of one, the shining anklets of another, a brilliant red strip of cloth, the intricate pattern of another's hairdress.

With our coming the singing and dancing had stopped. 609 The children grouped together moved toward us in a body, and then took to their heels, repeating this again and again, until the two or three we had already talked with at our camp took courage and squatted down at our feet. The older

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A Gankwe dancer.

[Facing P. 8]

(Facing page 8)

609 people kept their distance, and among them some pithy proverbs were spoken to bear upon the shortcomings of the white man. One or two of them turned to repeat to the dead what had been said, and there was great laughter. Sedefo [775] came to assure us that the dead man liked it very much. For the dead, it appeared, were especially susceptible to humor and to exceptional occasions.

764 About us, or edging their way toward us, were the [291] younger men in their ceremonial dress, the toga-like cloth covering their bodies, but leaving one shoulder bared for respect, and the women in their knee-length *pangi*, or [301] cloths, hanging from the waist, and their shining brass rings reaching from wrist to elbow and from ankle halfway up to the knee. Among the dancers, but standing somewhat [534] aloof, could be seen a man or woman with seed rattles about the ankles. These were the fine dancers. Of them our informant had spoken when he said, "They dance well at Gankwe."

[764] Carved stools were placed for us facing the coffin a little [356] to the left of the singers, where we could best see the danc- [533] ing. One or two lanterns were moved to give us better light. The drummers, who had not left their places, took up the rhythm again—one of the women had us know that the spirit of the dead man had communicated to the spirits of the drummers that he wanted to see the dancing resumed. The singing began—a woman's falsetto voice and a chorus; the hand clapping of the singers and bystanders emphasized the basic rhythm. It was slow at first, then quickened, and the dancing became more animated.

"They dance seketi," whispered our friends. "Later they will dance awasa."

764 535 The dancing was confined to a comparatively small space. It began with a barely perceptible motion of the feet of the dancers to the rhythm of the drums and the hand clapping. Then the feet began to execute figures in place, without leaving the ground, the arms hanging loosely at the side. This was continued for some time, until, arms flexed and held rigid at the elbow, and knees bent but rigid, too, the

intricate steps began. The movement of the feet, angular 764 and precise, was reiterated by the outstretched palms, 535 while all the muscles of the hips took up the rhythm. Now one of the men with the seed rattles at his feet danced facing [534] a woman who also had these rattles, and the dance became theirs with a chorus of dancers moving more and more to the side, keeping the rhythm with the feet. The drums beat faster, the hand clapping became louder. Those two balanced their bodies as they bent their knees lower and lower, all the while executing the figures with feet, arms, and hips, and how unaware they seemed of the audience! And even of each other, for what awareness there was to quicken the pulse of the dancing was more than one man's awareness of one woman. It might have been a dance to Asaase—the great Earth Mother—but it was, in fact, dancing for the dead, for the two would turn again and again to face the coffin, as the others had done, except during the intervals when they recalled the white man and woman in back, and turned to dance to us and our flashlights.

Seketi, awasa. . . . The dances changed, and the songs, and the drum rhythms changed, too. The children at our feet had fallen asleep and lay doubled over, their heads resting upon their toes. More men joined the dancers. It was long past midnight. The women who had infants on their backs moved away silently in the direction of their huts, but when an elderly woman tried to go, too, she was reprimanded and sat down again.

There was another leader for the singing, and another. A man's falsetto was heard in a long recitative that preceded [533] the dancing to the massed voices of the chorus. He faced now the dead, now us, as he improvised. Once more it was gay.

The dancing became more and more spirited, but when a dancer had continued in the circle for some time, an older woman coming forward from among the bystanders would put her arm about her and exclaim the singsong, "*Adoo!* . . . *Adoo!* . . . *Adoo!*" Others came forward to con-

964
535 gratulate the dancer, while another had taken her place in the dance, only to be brought to herself again when her dancing had become so abandoned that there was danger of falling or tripping. For it is always a bad thing for one's [994] *akra*—soul—to fall from exhaustion or even to trip while dancing, and it would have been especially dangerous to have fallen with the spirit of the dead so close.

As time passed, figures were seen edging away into the darkness. The knot of dancers thinned. Now there were [592] but two young women dancing. They wore identical cloths of a new material, a pattern resembling the cloth over the coffin. They were related to the dead man. When all were wearied, they had to go on dancing. . . . Dawn would not be long in coming.

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961 We knew that it would not be long before the spirit of the dead would be called upon to tell his family, fellow villagers, and clansmen how death had come upon him. For, in the Guiana bush, except for the very old, there is little natural dying. The deceased has been killed either by the gods whom he has offended or by the black magic of a powerful enemy, and it is of this which he must tell before his burial. When Sedefo came to our camp the next afternoon, we asked him about the "carrying of the corpse," as the ceremony is called. We told him that his people in Africa—for the Bush Negroes know that their origins are African—also asked the spirit of the dead why death had come upon him, and we plied him with questions. What would they do to be sure the answer was right? Who would ask the questions? When would they establish the facts of the killing? And might we come and see?

There would be no trouble, he told us amiably enough. The spirits of the dead liked attention, and for the *Bakra*—the white man—to come so often to his brother's bier was a compliment. We could return with him, but we must make haste—and it was evident that important ceremonies were about to take place.

DEATH AT GANKWE

And so once more we were in Sedefo's canoe running the rapids, and once more we pulled up at the landing place. 764

It was quiet enough there, and no one passing would have noticed anything out of the ordinary in the behavior of the one or two women washing clothes at the riverside, or of the children playing about in the water. [246] Again we climbed the path to the village, this time to the delighted shrieks of the children, whose cries brought others, until we were surrounded by a fearless, clamoring group, shouting, calling after us, "'Bak'a, Ame'ica' Bak'a!" Sedefo took us to his house, where we met the senior of his two wives, [595] and turned us over to a young man, who had played one of the drums in the ceremony of the evening before, to show us the village. This was the routine of courtesy due any visitor. [574] Nothing more tangible than a slight reserve marked the tension which made this village different from what it would have been on any midafternoon.

In front of the house of mourning all was quiet. Three elderly men sat on their low stools, talking in low tones. They greeted us as we passed but neither engaged us in conversation nor offered us a seat. Inside the house the small fire still smoldered, and, where the hammock had been, now crouched, soundlessly, an old woman who, we later learned, was the dead man's maternal aunt. We were struck with the number of houses that had symbols of spiritual protection over their doors—*obias*, they are called—magically treated to keep the spirits of death from harming the occupants. [778] As we passed one doorway, a woman holding a baby hastily threw a covering over its head, but not before we saw that it had special markings of sacred white clay on its face. The child was under treatment for some illness, and the mother, in these days when spiritual danger stalked about, could take no chances of the Bakra's magic obstructing the cure. [755]

On the other side of the village, farthest away from the house of death, life flowed on yet more evenly. But as we looked about, our guide stiffened, and soon we too caught the sound of the drums which rapidly became louder. He

764 hurried us toward the river and had quite got away from us as we came to the principal shrine of the village at the head of the path. As we started down the hill to the river an elder of Gankwe stopped us with an imperative, "You must not go."

Very loud and very fast the drums now sounded—it was [776] the rhythm to Kediampo, the Sky God—and a moment later the grave diggers appeared. They came not by the usual way and not under the spiritual guard, but along an overgrown side path. There were ten or twelve men, five of them muddied from their labors, carrying drums and cutlasses, the others, villagers who had awaited them. The men who had been digging wore green parrot's feathers in their hair, and they walked briskly and silently in single file to the house of mourning. There was a great stillness along the path of the diggers. The children had disappeared and the women sought shelter in their own doorways. Stools were not offered us—there was serious business at hand.

All the men in the village had gathered here; they stood in a semicircle about the front of the open shelter. The old woman slowly arose and, taking a small strip of white cloth, passed it once along each side of the coffin and once over the back as though she were ceremonially cleansing it. Four of the earth-stained young men now took up the coffin, lifting it from the bier and placing it on the ground in front of the house, raising and lowering it three times before it was finally set down. A fifth brought out two pads of green leaves, and two of the bearers put these on their heads. The questioning was about to begin.

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787 As they raised the coffin with the putrifying body within it on their heads, their muscles stiffened. With eyes half glazed, and expressionless faces, they seemed there but to do the bidding of the spirit of the dead man whose body they supported. They swayed forward and back, from side to side, without moving their feet, and the coffin swayed with their swaying. And then they began to advance, slowly at first, but after a few steps briskly, to a

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group of three elders who stood to the left of the death house. Three times they advanced, and three times retreated, and each time as they reached the three men, one of the elders would put up his hand, touch the end of the wooden box, and the bearers would retreat.

Sedefo took his place with the three and asked a question. The coffin advanced, retreated. Sedefo spoke again; what he said we could not hear, for his voice was so low that it reached us as a murmur. The response to the second question was disquieting; the men retreated without moving toward the questioner, step by step they moved slowly backward in a circle before us, and then, without any hesitation, they started on a run into the village along the path to our left. Two of the grave diggers followed them, for when the dead speaks, his replies to the questions asked him must be interpreted and attested.

Serious consequences may follow the expression of fact exposed by the dead. Repeated visits to a given house will point the finger of suspicion to the one who lives there, and a heavy fine at best, or expulsion from the village to certain death in the unprotecting bush at the worst, may be his fate. Supernatural forces are beyond control; here some man's destiny was being sealed by the automatic movements of two others under the hypnotizing influence of the spirit of the dead. Back came the coffin and the questioning was resumed. This time the man who took up the inquiry stood upwind, and we could hear his low voice.

"Did a white man slay you?" he asked. We watched anxiously. What if the answer should be that our coming to the bush had brought death in its train? But the bearers retreated when they came where the questioner was standing.

"Did someone at Gansee slay you?" Again the advance, and the backward steps to the mourning place.

"Did someone at Gandya village slay you?" The answer was "No."

"Did someone at Gankwe slay you?" And with the question, the corpse and its bearers once more disappeared from sight into the village, the women fleeing before it and

764 787 herding the children before them so that they would be upwind from the coffin and the stench of decaying flesh.

As they returned the rear bearer was relieved; the tension eased for a moment, but there was one man who did not smile. And it was whispered that he lived in the part of the village where the corpse invariably went. The scene changed slightly; Sedefo, who had stopped questioning, resumed his efforts, and five, ten, fifteen times the bearers advanced toward him and retreated from where he stood. Sometimes we caught our breath; the corpse was coming toward us; but always the bearers swerved before they reached us, going no farther than the grove of thorn palms that grew near the house of death. Then once more they broke through the ranks of questioners and, followed by the watchers, were off in the direction of the village council house and the dwelling of the chief.

The bearer who had been relieved came forward; the corpse, he said, wanted to speak; he must be allowed to carry the body again. This time there was little relief while the change was being made, for the man was possessed, and the air vibrated with the intensity of the spirit which [158] animated him. But apparently there were still difficulties. Again and again the questions were asked, again and again the bearers advanced, retreated. Sedefo kept insisting "Yu mu taki. You *must* speak!" and again the coffin advanced, retreated, and then once more went to our left into the village.

Clouds were rising to windward; the sun was low on the horizon. The bearers returned, advanced to the village head once, twice, again, and again, and then the coffin was placed on the ground, raised three times, and left there for a moment before others took it into the house and replaced it where it had been when we first saw it. The ceremony was over; the elders of the village went to hold council and to interpret what the dead man had said.

764 In the swift tropical dusk, Sedefo and his son came to take us back to our camp. The drummers were adjusting the drums for the night's dancing. "He spoke, ai," he told

us when we asked him. But what the pronouncement had been we were not to learn. 96A

"It takes a strong spirit to stand before the spirit of the dead," said our host when we returned to camp. "I don't wonder that you are tired."

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The burial took place on the seventh day of death, our sixth in the Suriname bush. Sedefo, who had promised to come for us so that we could see the ceremonies, had not appeared for two days, and we were certain that he would fail us. But on that day he appeared, just as we had eaten our noon meal. "We do not hurry the spirit," he explained, "but the burial must be over before the sun has gone. Make haste!" And again we went to Gankwe.

The dancing we had seen on the night of our first visit had been spirited, even gay. The carrying of the corpse had been terrifying in the spell of magic it had cast and in its grim potentialities. Today what we saw was saddening. For today the dead man was to say goodbye to his friends, his family, and his village.

All the preparations had been made, and as we came in sight of the house of mourning the ceremonies were beginning. The men were about as before, but there were women, too, and even a few of the older boys. Stools were offered us, and as we sat down the coffin was brought out of the hut into the open space in front of it. Once more four of the young men who had dug the grave took it off its bier; they raised and lowered it three times before it was finally set down upon the earth. And the same two bearers who had carried the coffin on their heads when the spirit of the dead had spoken were now to carry it once more. This time, however, the forward bearer placed a broad bit of palm leaf on his head before he took up the coffin. For after seven days in the tropical heat, protection against the drippings of the corpse could not be dispensed with.

Everything that had been used in the ritual of death was to be taken away with the body. The calabash con-

764 taining the drippings was taken away by two young men to be emptied, a third going ahead to warn of what was coming. The floor of the mourning house was swept by two others, and the sweepings carefully collected and placed, with the calabash, in the bungolo, the broken boat on which the corpse had lain until the coffin was made. The fire was extinguished; the open hut was to be left as it had been before death had come.

This time the corpse was carried to allow the spirit to say goodbye. Out and back, out and back it went. First to the village *krutu wosu*—the council house—where the dead man in life as a boy had sat and listened to his elders debate the affairs of the village, and where he as a full-fledged member of the community had "gone aside" with a group of his fellows to talk over more privately some proposal placed before the men by the council of old men and the village head. Then his body was carried to the portion of Gankwe nearest the river and back, and finally to the house where lived the mother of his dead wife, and where his little boy had been living since his mother's death. And now, for the first time, we heard wailing. "He is going from me. My children are gone," was the lamentation, as the coffin stopped, backed away, returned once more and yet once again to say a final farewell.

The eyes of many of the people who were standing about so quietly were moist. Another member of the village had gone, and kunu had again taken its toll.

Now the body rested upon the ground before the mourning house. To the rear of the coffin were the three drums and the drummers, ready to play. The rhythms began fast and loud, with the big agida drum carrying the basic beat and the apinti talking to the spirit of the dead. More people gathered; women ventured near in greater numbers, and Sedefo appeared with his shotgun to render the final salutes to the spirit. As the reverberations ended, Sedefo took up a bowl of powdered sacred white clay, and walking with measured step in time to the drums, sprinkled the ground so that a circle of white now enclosed the space about the coffin. A girl began to dance Vodu—she was

dancing to the snake god by whom she was possessed. 764
More people came, and these brought gifts of peanuts, [776]
cassava, sugar cane, rice. The food was thrown over the [787]
coffin and within the white circular path, on which a man was now dancing round and round in time to the drums. Faster and faster he twirled his way about the coffin, and now another joined him while a third walked slowly about the wooden box, a bunch of plantains in his hand, which he slashed from the stem with his machete so that they, too, fell over the coffin.

The men were dancing to the great Kromanti spirits; the
tiger—jaguar—and the buzzard, two of the three forms [776]
which the dreaded Kromanti obia can take. "Obia! Huh! Huh!" one ejaculated, imitating the tiger, as his dancing became wilder and wilder. As he ran about the village he wrested a branch from a tree and blindly slashed about him with it. He ran through the clump of thorn palms to our left and emerged with another branch, and now those about were on their guard, for to be struck with those thorns would cause serious lacerations. But the dancer's spirit, his Kromanti obia protected him against such consequences, for are not the Kromanti men immune to anything that wounds; are they not secure from danger of the iron bullets of a gun or the thrust of a machete? The girl with Vodu ran away as he came near her.

Soon, however, the drums were silent, and another shot was fired—the second salute to the dead. One of the elders of the village, bearing a bundle of several long green branches, took his place on one side of the coffin, a younger man on the other. We could not hear what he said, but as he finished speaking he struck the other three times over the bare back; the first two strokes lightly, but at the third he slashed as hard as he was able. It introduced the one note of merriment that afternoon. The people standing about laughed aloud as the ceremony was repeated. A woman, and then another man, were switched.

As this ended, Sedefo took the place of the elder, and in his hand was another kind of branch. This, too, was long, but except for a tuft at its very end it had been stripped of

764 all its leaves, while the butt of the stick was whitened with sacred clay.

Now the ceremony was drawing to a close, and the leave takings were to be said. Sedefo thrust the branch over the coffin, where it was grasped at its whitened end by the dancer who a few moments ago had been so frenzied. The laughter of an instant before was stilled; there was no wailing. Distinctly the low voice of Sedefo came to us as he addressed the corpse:

> [539] "*The hour has come when we must part from you. What the Earth has decreed we cannot help. We have done for you what we could. We have given you a funeral worthy of you. You must care for us, and you must deliver us from all evil that may come upon us.*"

As he finished, he slashed the branch in two with one quick stroke of his machete, so that the dancer held in his hand only the short whitened stump of what had been the long stem. The dancer then turned and walked sadly toward the river path still holding it in his outstretched hand, nor did he return to the village and the coffin.

Now the place that had been occupied by Sedefo was taken by an elder who held the second of the three sticks with their whitened ends. When Sedefo reappeared, he carried on one arm a little boy, the child of the deceased, and taking the dancer's place across the coffin he grasped the whitened end as the other had done. The separation from the group of men who had Kromanti spirits had taken place; the dead man was next to be separated from his family.

> [539] "*You see, we bring your child. Now he is alone. Try to protect him, that he may live in health and prosperity, that he may not fall into the water, that fire may not burn him. Protect him in the bush, that he may not be harmed. Now we must separate you from him. What we must do we cannot help, for it is willed by the law of the Earth.*"

With this, the second branch was slashed, and still holding the child Sedefo followed the Kromanti brother of the deceased with the same slow sad pace as he took the little boy and the whitened stump to the riverside to await the embarkation of the burial party.

What happened to the third branch we did not see. As the elder's voice faded away, the two bearers helped by their fellows once more took up the coffin and amid the renewed wailing of the women started toward the river. The villagers followed, and we too took the path to the waterside. But after a few steps we were halted by the people ahead of us; some rite was being performed. When we were finally able to proceed, the coffin was being placed in the boat that was to take it across the river to the burial ground. But just outside the spiritual guard, where it had been thrown to the side of the path, we noticed the long green portion of the branch with its freshly cut whitened end. It was here that the dead man had been separated from his village.

No women went to bury the dead. Three canoes, each with its complement of men, started off across the river. In the first boat, resting on the gunwales, the coffin had been placed, and in front and behind it were the bearers to steady it. Underneath was the broken boat with the sweepings of the house of death, the calabash in which the drippings had been, and the short whitened ends of the *sangrafu* branches by means of which the spirit had been parted from the living. As the canoe moved off with its load of coffin and paddlers, drums and drummers, two more shots were fired as the final salutes of the village. The third canoe came back twice; once for two broken pieces of iron which had been forgotten, once for the gun. But the canoe was not turned about; the boat was paddled backwards toward the landing place, and someone waded out to hand the desired object to the men in the boat. To turn around would be hazardous; death is dangerous, and they could not tempt danger by giving the spirit hovering about a clue where to return. We stood and watched the little flotilla disappear about the bend, and with us stood the heavy-eyed men and women. Then, when we had all washed away

Then, when we had all washed away
764 the taint of death in the flowing river, we turned and once
[783] more climbed the path to the village.

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The muffled sound of a gunshot came to us as we sat in the hut of the headman, speaking of the funeral. "Another child gone," he said, "Soon he will be safe in the earth."

[796] We had not been permitted to go across the river to witness the burial. "It is a dangerous place for those who do not know it," the headman said. "*Ogi*—evil things—are there, bad spirits who harm those who are not prepared, and we do not want evil to come to you. Several years ago there was a Bakra here when we buried another Gankwe man. He asked to go, and we granted him his wish. But the spirits of the bad bush across the river harmed him and he died, and now his ghost plagues us."

A second shot told us that the bearers had reached the grave after their march through the deep bush where living man seldom came. They had sung the *papa singi*—the dirges—which are intoned as the dead is borne to the grave. Once arrived there and the invocations pronounced, the salute fired, and the gods propitiated, two men would descend into the deep hole there to lift down the coffin and place it in the tunnel-like excavation dug under the undisturbed earth to the side of the large opening; would place it so that the falling earth might not disturb the spirit of the dead.

A third shot.

[413] The body was in the grave. The heaping of earth, with the burial hoe, with feet, and with fingers, back into the hole that had been so laboriously dug had commenced. The sun was getting low and darkness comes early in the big bush.

Now the last shot told us of the final ceremony. The food that had been brought for the last offering was being placed on the mound of heaped-up earth. The strip of white cloth to the spirit was being pushed into the ground on its stick. The burial party was backing away from the grave, slowly, slowly, so that the spirit would not be alarmed, so that it

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would not guess that the living were eager to desert him. And then all would turn and run as fast as they could to the river's edge, where the unwashed dirt that had accumulated during the digging of the grave, and the more serious spiritual contamination to which they had been exposed in handling the body, would be washed away in the safety of the flowing water.

We strained to see the returning party as our canoe was being paddled and poled upstream through the rapids to our camp. But it was too dark, and we heard nothing but the sound of water over rocks.

Chapter II

WHILE THE RIVER WAS HIGH

I

501 313 NOW this was a busy time of the year, and the river so full of canoes that a man floating down a lumber raft to the railhead might expect to meet ten or twelve dugouts in a day.

221 Men in laden corials were returning from the French side for the harvest festivals. They had been away eighteen months or longer, and now they were coming back to burn new rice and cassava fields for their women, and to beget new children. When the harvesting was done was a fine time for love, and a woman with a child in her womb was the very luckiest for planting a field. These returning men, in the prime of life, with powerful bodies and muscles that were as so many great snakes coiling and uncoiling underneath the gleaming moist skins were deferential toward strangers. For it would have been unseemly to thrust at the first comer their adventures on the Marowyne River, and a man who was returning with many possessions had to exercise particular care that he angered neither men nor gods. Yet among themselves they could not keep from a certain amount of swagger.

"Ai ba! Ai mati!" they exclaimed to each other in reply to the most casual comment. "Indeed, brother! Yes, friend!" This was no more than the mode of address of the [596] Awka people who live along the Marowyne, but "Ai ba! Ai mati!" stood for the password of the larger outside

world, and they flung it at each other proudly, for it stood 821
for the experience of making their way among strangers and earning sums with which to fill a large corial, and much else.

The men who had remained on the river found special 521
pleasure in imparting to these returning ones some weighty gossip.

"At Gankwe they are burying Sedefo's younger brother," they said as the boats passed each other, and they went into the details of Zimbi's death and the kunu which was decimating the family.

"Asikanu has been charged with adultery by Matafo. [684]
Asikanu's family is offering a great fine, but it is far from settled yet."

All this was by way of preface. To come to the real news without casual preliminaries would have been the way of a child, but a Man Nengere, a full-grown Negro, knew better.

"Last year a white man came here with another one—a doctor. He said he would come back with his wife. He has brought his wife. He says they are going up the river. He says they are going to the Granman's country."

Up and down the great stretches of water as the boats 903
passed each other, the news was given. Word and conjecture floated down river and into the creeks, reaching even the lower river Awka villages.

"The Bakra told me Awka is an African word. There is a place in Africa called Awka, and a people in Africa called Awka people. He knows Africa!"

"Kye, ba! Kye, mati!"

Word and conjecture were carried up river in the boats which were being poled upstream against the rapids. It would be some time yet before there would be legends, and songs about the American whites who had made their way into this bush. Now there could only be talk. The Bakra had a machine which talked back to you, if you talked into its horn, and when it talked back, it said the same thing you did, sang back the same song, and if you laughed, it laughed, too.

203 And did men speak into the horn, and sing? Would there be no harm to the *ak'a*—the soul?

[193] Their own trickster, Asanai, the spider, working with his fabulous cunning, could not have spun the stories about the whites faster than had the passing boats. From boat to boat, from boat to shore, from shore to village the news went. Had the white man come with guns, or had he come accompanied by many others, then, to be sure, it would have been a matter for the drums. But the vagaries of a white man coming with his wife are of no ritual concern. The drums would only sound on occasions of moment; to summon the men for a council of the clan or to ask, ritually, for [534] the health of a chief; to tell of death; or to speak to the gods themselves. But for a white man with his woman, gossip was good enough to carry the news.

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Up and down the river, in the villages where they had visited the year before, many a woman to whom the Bakra had given a string of yellow beads, or a large glittering safety pin to put in her hair as an ornament, or, better still, a large tin can out of which her husband had fashioned a broad band to be worn on her arm, one which glistened as it reflected the pale light of the moon during a dance—such a woman heard of the coming of the Bakra with pleasure. She had them all, these gifts, safe in the carved calabash on which she had incised the sinuous lines of the snake spirit that gave her fertility, and now that the gourds were ripening once again, she would carve another to hold the new things that the whites would bring her.

The young men, too, heard of their coming with pleasure. For would not the strange ways of the Bakra and his woman give them many witty new things to put into words and sing to the traditional seketi tunes, the secular songs that they would later sing in the intervals of the religious dances? It was good to make up new words, which made a man the center of the dance. Ambe! But the women loved the man who could put clever new words to their dance songs!

The children heard the news with fear, for at four, at five, they were not too young to have learned of the enormi-

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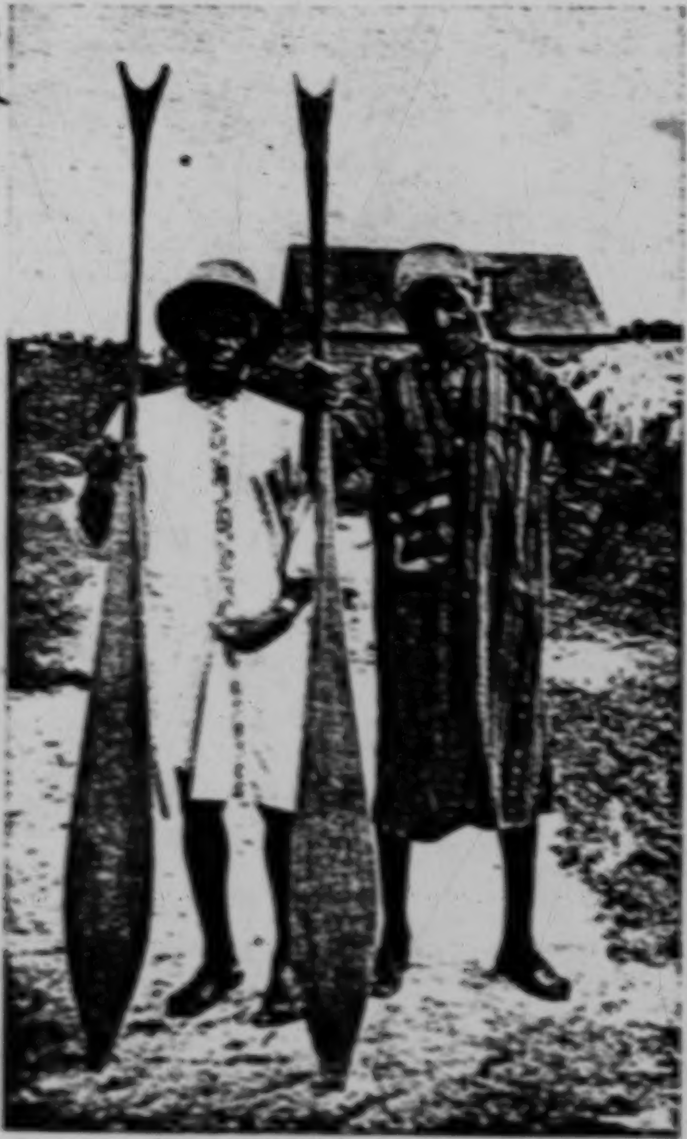

Village elders on a ceremonial visit.

[Facing p. 24]

ties of the white men of long ago and the deeds of their slave ancestors, who had won for them freedom in this bush. 609 177

But what of the old men? What of them who govern and know proverb and parable to fit all ceremonial occasions, whose word is final in clan councils? What of those who call the gods and speak to the ancestors and who, surpassing all else in wisdom, know how to control *obia*, the great healing spirit which Nyankompon, the Sky God, created after he had brought earth and water into being, so that man might live? At the landing place of the balata camp, a group of such men were gathered and stood about talking. A Loango elder who was on his way to visit his relatives at Kadyu, his lower river clan village, had espied a clansman on the shore and had come up in his boat. 648

"A man and a woman came. And they are going up the river until . . . until beyond the Mamadam and Baikutu, until . . . past the Felulasi Falls, until . . . they come to the Tapa Water and into the Pekien Rio, and until . . . they arrive at the Granman's village."

The speaker, a younger man who had come from up river to the death ceremonies at Gankwe spoke with a certain eagerness, and made of the telling a long recital, drawing out the singsong word "*te*"—until—more and more with each repetition, and in this way intensifying both the distance and the hardships in these vast and vaster stretches. 609 803 648

"Ayo! A long way. Will the Ga'ma' let them come?"

"Ya-hai, tio! You must ask, will the gods let them come!"

"Kere, kere! You must ask if the ancestors will let them come!"

"They carry no guns."

"Then they bring us their gods."

"Kweti-kweti! And that's what I don't understand. They say they come to learn."

"By Ando! But what does that mean?"

"Well, they speak the proverb down below, they say: 'It isn't for nothing that the worm crawls from side to side.'"

"Massa Neng'e, but it's true, true."

"The white man wants to get the black man's obia."

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"The whites have wars against each other. . . ."
"Our ancestors. . ."
Before the last speaker could finish, a man broke in with a prayer. His voice was conversational and sounded as though he were addressing someone present.

"Great Sky God,
Kediamo, Kediampon,
Mother of the River,
Sacred ancestors,
Grant that if the white man comes for evil
His race end.
Grant that if the white woman comes for evil
Her womb wither, her line perish."

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But the Loango headman shook his head and said, "The gods will deal with them, have no fear. Do you remember the man who was drowned at the Mamadam, and the one who died way beyond the Granman's country, and that other one, the soldier? They came with evil in their hearts. The gods killed them. The gods will deal with these, too."

And another said: "Let them go up the river. The gods know all. The ancestors know all. This is our land, and our earth spirits will protect us, and they will kill our enemies. This is our river. Our river gods will protect us, and kill our enemies. This is our bush. The gods of the bush are strong. The gods of the bush know their bush children. They know their children's enemies."

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Then the Loango elder spoke again: "We have the gods from Africa. They are more than all gods. The African gods know all. They will watch over us. We have the obia spirits, the African obia spirits. Mati, friends, let them go up the river. Have no fear. Our gods are with us."

The men's soft, sober voices spoke the words without emotion. Theirs were the voices of destiny. Well might the answering chorus intone the affirmations, while the colloquy went on of leader and chorus, leader and chorus, now one taking up the main theme, now another. To us the cadenced speech came floating softly on the still air.

WHILE THE RIVER WAS HIGH

The sun stood over the sacred silk-cotton tree toward the [136 Gankwe side of the land. Across the path leading from [137] somewhere in the back of our shelter the parasol ants, each with its strip of green many times its size, made their way toward an unknown spot where no shelter stood, and no one trod. Like a wave the wide ribbon of green rose and fell as it crossed the ridges of the pathway. In unending numbers they came, and the lizards darting in and out of the brush swerved in the direction of the shelter to avoid the marching line, so that at our feet things moved now up, now back again.

While the men were at the landing place, one of the 888 women who was drying rice on the high flat rocks opposite [251] our shelter paddled over in her boat, and, passing the men with a formal greeting, walked on and stopped to talk with us. She was not a young woman. Her time for childbearing was long over, her wrinkled breasts sagged almost to her [304] waist. The cicatrized designs which once had stood out so clearly, and in her youth had been so valued, were but faintly penciled on her face and about her breasts. Had she cared, she might have reopened the cuts, might have had ashes rubbed into them to make the keloids stand out black and alive against the dark brown of her skin. But what need had a woman her age to care? What need to urge life into symbols of fertility on face and between breasts and about her navel, when her time for fruitfulness was over? Of what use to reanimate the incised scrolls between her thighs, when the legend they told in terms of reproduction was for her a dead legend?

She came toward us slowly, balancing a bottle on her 888 head. A faded cloth covered her from waist to knee, and at [482] her waist a bit of the kerchief necessary to the attire of the 291 married woman, even at work, could be seen. She wore a 301 few beads on a cord about her neck, but she had no other ornaments, for ornaments were for festive occasions, and the cloth tied about the neck and worn cape fashion was for women who had children to carry straddling their backs, and woven garters below the knee were conceits of the young.

888 young. Once she, too, had liked to have her calf look round and full.

[437] [276] "Will you exchange this bottle of palm oil for tobacco?" she asked, showing her empty clay pipe.

She came in, saying she would like to rest, and began unfastening her top tunic so that she might make a pad of [784] it on which to sit down on the ground, for the earth spirits forbid women who had reached puberty to sit upon the bare earth. In her second tunic, somewhat fresher than the top one, she stood hesitating, looking about her for a place to sit down, until we brought her a carved stool we had bought the day before. Instead of putting on the top pangi again, she used it to cover her knees.

[576] "*Bak'a muye*," she said, "white woman, you ought to cover your knees, too, when you sit."

And sitting there, examining us and our belongings, she muttered her comments about our appearance and dress as she smoked, and muttering she swayed slightly, until the swaying rhythm seemed to bring a melody into her head, and she began to sing.

[533]
"*The American Bak'a*
Have come from far,
American koni
Has brought them
To the Saramacca River,
To the Saramacca people;
They must not sicken
They must not die."

While the men on the shore talked and called upon their gods to keep them free, the woman rocked and sang this invocation for our safety, forgetting for the moment that we were whites, whom the ancestors hated.

"You have so much wealth," she said to the white man, looking about her at our provision boxes, "you must have many wives."

And back again she went to her song, repeating the words over and over, until seeing people approach she rose slowly and went back to the river where her rice was drying.

WHILE THE RIVER WAS HIGH

3

Toward us came Tenye, a young friend of last year, and 882
two small boys. She had seemed but a child the year before when she had danced bandamba with the other little girls while the men were getting ready for the Kromanti dance. But now she looked quite grown, and instead of the small apron she had worn, was wearing a cloth of a woman.

"You've grown, Tenye."

"*Ay, a kiri bobbi baba,*" one of the youngsters said. "She has her breasts already," and he went on to say that soon she would marry. "Two moons more," he said, showing two fingers.

"You will soon have many bracelets, Tenye, and when you dance you will be splendid." 883

"Ai," the boy went on speaking eagerly, "Abane will teach us how to dance when he comes back. He went to the French shore. Abane made Tenye, and he made me, too. I am Yamati, and he made Sabape, here." But they had not the same mother, nor did they live in the same village. "When I grow up," the child went on, "I will dance with seed rattles at my ankles. I will dance like Abane." The rattles his uncles would have to buy for him, or when grown he might buy them for himself, but his father would give him his gods when he was of age, and good dancing, too, was a thing of the gods.

"Who will get Abane's seed rattles, Tenye? Will you get them because you are the oldest child of the first wife?"

"Ah, no!" both she and the indomitable Yamati exclaimed at the same moment, and then both lowered their heads and would say no more, while the small Sabape looked away.

Now we had the year before discovered why we were so 609
often met by young and old with the phrases, "I do not 123
know," or better still, "*Massa Gadu sabi*—God alone knows," when it was evident that the speakers knew the answer very well indeed. The reason lay with the will of the G'an Yorka, or the G'an Zombi, or the Nana, as the ancestors are variously called. The ancestors it seemed had long

609
123 ago, so long that no one knew just when it happened, instructed that no one might impart to another, a stranger, more than half of what he knew. Moreover, no young person dared to speak at all of the supernatural, and such matters as inheritance were regulated by the laws of the gods and ancestors, who punished infractions with the scourge of kunu—a term we were to hear so much in this Suriname bush.

302 Tenye's head as we looked down upon it was a mound of wool, with little braids, each no more than an inch or an inch and a half long, fastened by a bit of black thread, each braid pointing upwards. This was called "tatafi," we knew, and to change the subject we talked about the styles of [855] hairdressing. A child's hair usually was closely cropped, and the heads of both Yamati and Sabape looked as smooth as blackened gourds. Tenye's hair had been cut but a little while ago, a moon perhaps, when the braids had grown so long that it had been too much bother even to make the hair look well in the fashion of what was called the coiled head, or the earth furrow style. Both of these types of hairdressing consisted of braids which diverged from the center in many rows, appearing at the outer edge at intervals of one inch, or slightly more. These ends were caught up and rebraided around the head, to form either the one coil of "lollo 'ede," or the several coils of "gon wi." There were also the single long braids—the "pitto"—and the "pina bonsu" way of hair combing, where the head when properly dressed makes a design of narrow strips of scalp showing between flat ribbons of braids, which look like so many snake vertebrae, radiating from the middle of the head outwards.

"When you come back from up river, I will dress your hair," said Tenye to both of us. "You," she said, pointing, "will become an obia man in your white country, and you will look so well that your husband won't ever remember to go to his other wives."

302
754 But now Tenye's maternal aunt who had approached unobserved came to call the children away. She was not in

good humor, and looked with disfavor on the friendly 302
conversation between us. Her bad temper, we learned 154
later, had earned for her the name of Mother Snake, given [157]
her by a witty town servant of a lumber factor. The idea of dressing our hair apparently appealed to the woman, however, for it would certainly only be a reckless white who would offer his hair for combing to a stranger, since with hair any number of supernatural things might be done. With the proper formula, a few hairs, and the required ingredients she might fashion an *opo*, let us say. Now an opo serves many purposes, but its essential quality is that it gives its owner power over the one whose essence is captured in the form of hair, or a scrap of garment, or finger nails, or whatever else had touched the person against whom one has designs. The power of the possessor of the opo is to dominate the will of the other, and its particular attribute might be to function in love, or in a court of justice, or in matters of getting employment, or of receiving gifts. But an opo would be the least dangerous consequence, for an opo is not to be conceived of as being in the category of bad magic. There is the danger of *wisi*—a word which has the double meaning of poison and black magic—and hair, or finger nails, or the menstrual cloth of a woman, or perspiration are the very best materials for working wisi.

And so the good woman, known when she was among us as Tita, and as Mother Snake otherwise, saw that we offered no cause for alarm and added her advice to Tenye's in pointing out powers which we might acquire and use to spectacular advantage in our white country.

"Yes, you must make pina bonsu," she said, adding her 609
approval, "and then your husband will prefer you to his 304
other wives. But if you want to keep him all to yourself, you must let us cut *kamemba*—cicatrized designs—on you. An ingi kodjo here on each cheek to begin with," turning to Tenye and smiling.

And so it was all planned. The Indian cudgel, a euphemism for the buttocks, and procreative symbols were to be

609 304 given to the white woman when she returned from up river, yet with it all the thighs would still need to be cicatrized.

"Then," she said, speaking of the cicatrized thighs, "then he simply won't think of any one else, because among you, you will be the only one. We who all have the kamemba must see that it looks well, but you will be the only one."

3

123 606 [illegible] 304 The boys remained with us, amusing themselves by giving us their words for the various objects about us.

The strings about their waists, which formed their only clothing, the fiber cord with the bell about Sabape's neck, the word for garter, and machete, and shoes, boxes, and water jar, and all else they could see were named. A flashlight was a diamond fire, and a collapsible chair a hammock chair, and if we showed them something they had never seen it was a *Bakra sani*—a white man's thing.

Sabape spoke little, for he was a timid child and looked sluggish. He had but few cuts on his body, while Yamati, who was about the same age, had already several fully outlined designs.

"Why have you nothing about your neck, Yamati?"

"Oh, but I have. I have cuts. You can either have an obia cut, or an *obia tetai*—a string. It is to make us live. All children have it."

"And when do they start making kamemba?"

"A long time ago they start. If it doesn't hurt too much, they cut one more, and soon one more. But if it hurts too much, they wait until . . . ," he said, finishing on the [195] word *te* . . . in the characteristic way of the grown narrator who uses the monosyllable to intensify space and time and danger and bounty.

123 609 Yamati found so much delight in his rôle as teacher that he became stern with us and had us say the words over again and again. There was the word for firefly which pleased him not at all. "*Mi taki, mi taki-e, anaka-nyenye*—I say, I am saying . . . " ("if you would but listen," his voice

implied), and he repeated the word over and over, until this 123
led us to talk about singing, and at last we had them 609
consent to dance susa for us. It had to be done very quietly,
in the slight clearing in back of the shelter. Susa is an 535
African dance. It is danced by men only, in pairs, and is
something of a game. The one who wins "kills" his opponent.
The earth spirits are said especially to like it, and it is
danced in the fields or in the villages for them.

There they stood, Yamati and Sabape, facing each other, 535
their enlarged navels almost touching. One agreed to be 524
"in," and one "out," and as they began, their jaws came
forward in a patterned, pugnacious way, and their arms
moved to reproduce in pantomime shield and spear, while
the feet crossed and recrossed.

Kesi-kesi g'a S'sa
Zond'o linga [533]
Linga-li

The monkeys
Go to dance susa
Without rings.

Huh, huh, huh!

They sang the song over and over again, panting at the end of each verse to dramatize combat.

"I killed him," said Yamati. He had won, and they began again. If the one who had agreed to be "in" had his foot on the outside as they clashed, then he lost—he was killed.

4

As they were dancing, we noticed a young man we had 439
never seen before. He was standing watching the youngsters
at their play, smiling as though he enjoyed their contest.
He was very dark, even for a Bush Negro, short and stocky,
with unusual muscular development of arm and chest and
thigh. His age, one would judge, was nineteen or twenty.
He turned his smile on us when he realized we were noticing
him.

439 "I heard that you are buying things we make, as you did last year in my village. I have come with balata from my uncle, and I brought a stool to sell. Would you like to see it?"

And so Bayo brought us his stool. It was not well carved. Indeed, compared with even the least skilled carvings on benches and combs and trays and food-stirring paddles, the workmanship was crude. But one does not refuse a proffered article bruskly, and we sat down to talk with him about it.

531 322 It was Bayo who gave us our first insight into the meaning of Bush Negro designs, gave us our first information about this, as about so many other customs and practices. What is carved on the wood which the men work with such care has significance, and carries meaningful symbols which the Bush Negro is unwilling to reveal. That there might be symbolism in the art we had before suspected, but usually, when we asked, we heard the skillful evasions of which the Bush Negro is master. He did not know. Only the carver himself could say, but the carver was away or long dead. Or we would hear that it was carving, that it was carved to beautify it, that it was of an in-and-out design. Or, with carefully pointing finger that indicated the ornamentation, the Bush Negro would say, "This is wood."

531 So we talked to Bayo about his stool, expecting to hear one of the usual replies. But this time and without any urging we heard what we had so long wondered about. "Look," he said, tracing out the lines of the interwoven pattern, "this is a man, this a woman. This is her head, those her breasts, this her womb. Here are his head, his arms, his legs. We call this *womi-ko-muye*—man-and-woman. Here are the children which they will make," and his hands traced another series of designs on the top of the stool.

439 789 We bought his stool, and he stayed and talked of many things. Did we want to buy an *obia*—a charm? One day he would like to become an obia man. Already he could make obias which protect the wearer when he walks on the water.

Had we provided ourselves with the necessary obias with which to travel to the country of the Granman? He had never been so far up the river. He would like to go there. Ai-yo! He would like to go and see Dahomey, the sacred city, and look at the Tapa Wata falls, and visit the Granman's village. Did we have all our paddlers? He was strong, and he liked to make a boat walk up the rapids. He could get his father to come with him as steersman. His father had strong obias and knew the river. We could not go until the river went down, but he would stay with us here and wait, and if we wished it he would go back upstream to his village and get his father and food, and be ready for us in time. He needed the money the Bakra would pay, too, for he wanted to be married soon, and he would have to buy many things for his woman and her mother. 439 789 484

When he left us, he went to one of the little enclosed houses that were there for travelers, choosing the one closest to us, and built a small fire. His younger brother and the white dog that came in his boat sat with him. The dog wore a cord about his neck, covered with red ochre, to keep him safe in the bush. That night as we ate we could see Bayo, his brother, and the dog squatting close to the fire and eating, too. And all the next day, and for several days to come, as we waited, Bayo was with us, talking, laughing, explaining, and making and buying obias for us to carry us safely on our journey to the Granman. [231]

5

In the afternoon one of the political chiefs of the neighboring Christian village came to hear our phonograph. But when we asked him to sing into it, he said, "Ask me later. Now I am alone. We Saramacca people never do anything when we are alone." We had the year before acquired a powerful obia against slander and bearing false witness against us, and found the occasion useful for corroborating the invocation we had been given. The man, however, spoke with the greatest reluctance and looked 609 123

609 123 vastly relieved when he saw several boats pull up at the shore.

It appeared that these newcomers were also interested in our phonograph, but that no one would consent to be the first to sing, until at last a young boy came up.

609 123 971 "I'll sing for you," he said, and it was at once whispered that the boy came from a family of powerful obia men, that he was sure of his spirit. "I'll sing, yes, but you must let me tell the machine something first."

What he said was an invocation to his soul and his personal gods, and he spoke it by putting his face into the horn of the phonograph and talking in a rapid whisper, making audible the one phrase: "Bakra obia isn't my obia." Subsequently when we discussed this occurrence with older men, they made the matter clear to us. He had assured his spirits that he was not conceding anything to our magic, and that they were neither to feel slighted nor to relax their vigilance. The gods favored the strong and the proven, and a young man had to be careful, for the gods were not conceived as especially logical or rational or inexorably just, so that one had to guard against becoming the victim of their caprice.

609 123 Boat after boat pulled up at the shore, and up the road came a long line of callers. Women with infants straddling their backs, a breast drawn to the side so that the child might feed as it rested there; children with cords about their waists; young girls and boys, each with a square of apron across the front, or a loin cloth; and the men with togas and paddles, dignified and solemn, drawing nearer silently.

On our provision boxes sat those who had come early, particularly women nursing children, or old women who looked on with tired wonder. On the floor everywhere about our feet and against the posts sat the children we knew, while those who had come for the first time and were still fearful kept their distance, hiding behind some relative.

It was a great occasion, a spectacle of white man's magic, and they were there to verify it for themselves. Now there

was much of white man's magic that was not astonishing. 609
Old men and young men had heard of machines with people 123
on them that flew like birds, but had they not their own stories about the sacred vulture, the *opete*, that carried one of their warrior ancestors away from slavery across the river and into this bush? He had simply mounted the bird and said to it, "On your back is my home. You [913]
can fly over land, and you can fly over water. I have no boat. You must carry me." And the opete took him. Then [776]
there are beings with wings that range the sky, and some of them are birds, and some of them are spirits. No, a machine that flew like a bird was not astonishing magic. Then there was the kino—shadows appearing and moving about like the living—that you could see in the cities. Men on the French shore, too, had seen the kino, but it was a gift any man might have to see things. But here was something which talked back at you. . . .

"Ke . . . !"

"Massa Nen'ge!—Master Nigger!"

"Ma Nen'ge . . . !"

And even our town servant exclaimed, "*Mi Gado*—My God!"

Now all this was very well, except that the Bakra, not satisfied with the ordinary seketi dance tunes, kept asking for Kromanti songs—the warrior-spirit songs—and the bush-god songs, and river-god songs. From one man and from another came the expected, "I do not know such songs." The women did not even dare approach the machine.

At last Apanto came. His hair was braided and he wore a 609
jaguar tooth on a cord about his neck. He was not so 123
muscular as other men of his age, and when he went about 115
there was a softness in his movements that was unaccountably disquieting. His hands were not the hands of a worker of lumber, nor of a boatman who was accustomed to pole heavily loaded boats. They were smaller, and his fingers were narrow at the ends. Apanto, we discovered later, was what the Bush Negroes called a "tiger fighter." In a quarrel, he did not cuff and strike out with his fists, but

609 scratched like a "*tigri*"—a tiger, for this is how the Bush
103 Negroes name the jaguar. Later, when we saw him dance
115 the Tigri Kromanti dance, we witnessed one of the most
realistic feline interpretations imaginable. But that is
another matter.

Now Apanto was an obia man to be reckoned with, and his fellow villagers and the villagers of neighboring settlements treated him with a deference that his age alone could never have commanded. And it was this Apanto who now came up and said that he would sing the sacred Kromanti songs for our phonograph.

"You will not understand the songs. They will be in the Kromanti language," he warned us. "They are strong, and the machine must be strong to carry them."

It happens that a field phonograph is anything but strong.
The mechanism is simple, since the instrument must be
light enough to be carried about, and yet it often is sub-
jected to all manner of hard usage. To this is added the
[126] hazard of the climate. The turntable is actuated by a belt
running from the mechanism inside the case, and the ends
of this belt are glued together. This, to be sure, we dis-
covered later. At the moment, we met Apanto's challenge
with assurance. We did not doubt that the machine was
spiritually strong.

126 What he said about the Kromanti language was true.
533 The Kromanti tongo, of which we had been told during our
[197] first visit here, we were finding to be an actuality, and
534 although we took down the words as he sang them, aided
in hearing them by the repetitions, their meaning was
unknown to us. Some of them we learned later. Some of
them we knew. "Obia" we knew concerned the spirit,
[776] the vague force known by that name, while "Amba" was
a deity sacred to Saturday, and was given as a "day name"
[551] to women born on that day of the week. This, then, is what
he sang:

"*Ma djeni ye-ye*
Obia kule ma djeni no-ho
Obia mo-ye

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533
539

Amba djeniyi, obia-mi yi-yi
Mo djeni-o
Mo djeni-o-ye
Obia mi-i
Man djeni no-ko
Obia mo-i
Amba djeni-o-i, obia-i-i
Man djeni no-ko, obia-i."

The music was slow and soft, and in Apanto's appealing voice the song took on a strangely moving quality. But as he sang, a stir went through the people who were listening.

"He calls his obia, ai."

"His obia will fight the spirit of the machine."

"The Bakra is cunning, but obia is strong. We shall see."

The song came to an end, the recorder was lifted. We looked at Apanto. "Will you sing another? See, the thing is not finished. There is room for more."

He looked. Yes, one could see there was room for more. Yes, he would sing more. This time the song was livelier, louder. As Apanto sang, he seemed to force the song into the horn, and this time there were no murmurs from those watching.

"*Yen-bo, yenbo,*
A yen-bo-bo no
Yen-bo, yenbo,
A yen-bo. . . . "

And with this the machine began to give way. There was a rattling sound, a scratching. The machine went more slowly, then stopped. About us the murmurs became excited. Hastily we fitted a new cylinder, hastily we tested it. It was no use. We soon found the cause. The glue had softened in the tropical dampness, and the ends had pulled loose. It was almost dark, and there was no sun to dry a newly applied coat of glue.

126 Apanto looked at us. "The Bakra is cunning," he
533 repeated. "But obia is stronger. In the bush obia rules.
123 Kromanti is too strong for the spirit of the machine."

Swiftly the dark of the bush came down. The people who had been watching, listening to what had passed, were leaving to go to their villages and to spread the news of the power of obia, and how Apanto had defeated the spirit of the machine that talks back what has been said to it. And with the gathering dark, we could sense the pulse of the drums and hear a faint echo of the shrill cry of the women dancing at Gankwe for the spirit of the dead man who lay there in the house of mourning.

Chapter III

ON THE SARAMACCA RIVER

1

ON THIS, the second morning after the burial of Sedefo's brother, Bayo started downstream from the village of Djamungo before daybreak. With all the vigor of his youth and the freshness of the morning, he pushed off from shore, and with sharp, short strokes ran his canoe into midstream and through the foaming rapids below the village. In and out, and in, went the paddle, until he was past the rough water which made a tumbling fortification for his village. His eyes wandered back for an instant as he sat there, taking in at a glance the dark outlines of the two silk-cotton trees which reared themselves above the line of matted jungle, and the gleam of natural clearing on the opposite, uninhabited bank, where trees stood singly here and there above the low underbrush. "Ai-yo!" he exclaimed half aloud, thinking how well it was with his village. It was good to have been born where twin silk-cotton trees stood and across the river from where the Apuku—the little people of the bush—held council at night. It was the Apuku, to be sure, who had seen to this pleasant open place, and no man, whatever his need, would put to use this land which the gods had accommodated to their own purposes. 484

Those rapids, too, were higher than any on the lower river, he thought, as he paddled vigorously in the still water. To have thought of the rapids at all, while going [133]

484 through them, would have meant courting the displeasure of the spirit which animated the troubled stretch, and would have been dangerous. He was a Man Nengere and knew all this well, for was he not ready to marry Dida any 582 time now? He would have to wait as yet, but perhaps [584] during the next planting her breasts would come, and then in a month, two, three, she would be ready to marry. He was, in fact, in the mood even to cast about for a second wife, though his marrying her would have to wait many years. All that would come, for what with the money he already had earned, and the sums he would get for the wood he might bring down the river later, and this money the Bakra would give him, he would have enough to pay for the hammock, the cloth pangi, the handkerchiefs, the [584] bracelets and beads, and whatever else a man needed to give to his woman and her mother for a fine marriage.

484 Going through this stretch of still water, which Bayo always found dull, he thought of this and that, for there was no work for his muscles but the monotony of the dip and stroke of the paddle. Going upstream it was different. There the challenge of the slipping pole-stick against submerged slime-covered rocks made a man prove himself. It spoke to the warrior blood in him, which found no outlet in these quiet times. But this was only idling, and his mind found pleasure in wandering, especially if it happened, as now, to be dark enough to make it worthless for him to look about for the things that grew and stirred in the bush.

Yes, it would be almost three hours before the sun was high, and when it stood there—he indicated the place in the heavens to himself with his eye—he might be loading the Bakra's boats to go up river, for word had come from top-side that the Mamadam would be safe in a few days, and now if the Granman meant for the Bakra to get to the upper river, he would be sending word down almost any time. And he, Bayo, was ready for the journey. 484 Here in the blue canister, which he had bought in the city 574 on the Queen's last birthday with part of the money he had

got for the timber he and his great-grandfather had 484
floated down the river, he had two fine cloths. One was 574
older and was intended for visiting the villages on the way, and the new one was for the Granman's village. For this occasion, too, he was saving a pair of newly woven garters, though he would wear the two strands of small coral and yellow beads in some of the villages on the way. At Lamé, for instance.

Ai-yo! He would see to it that he looked well at Lamé, 789
for Lamé had handsome women, and at Lamé the women 776
knew how to love. His own powerful love obia had come [321]
from Lamé, and there it was in his canister and there beside it was a potent fighting obia which his uncle, who was surpassed by few on the river in the strength of his obia spirits, had made for him. Some day, when Bayo was older, he, too, would know all these secrets, for his uncle had given him some of his gods, and at dances he already showed that he had a strong spirit. Until that time came, he had the obia from Lamé to win for him the love of his fellow men, and should it not avail against the magic of some surly fellow who wished him ill, then he had the other which would serve him in trouble. And on his upper arm was his Kromanti obia—the magically potent iron band—which, by tightening, would warn him when trouble was impending. That was the way to go through life—a man asked the gods to help him meet whatever might come, the good spirits with good, and the bad with yet greater evil.

Up above, whirling past him in the pale dawn, the 484
parrots flew, making a screeching chorus in the stillness, 576
and rousing him to the murmur of the next rapids which he was approaching.

What was that? A boat. Going downstream, he was soon alongside it.

"*Tio*, greetings," he called to the man, speaking in the subdued ceremonial voice.

"Thank you, tio," answered the older man, for he addressed a stranger.

[illegible] & Herskovits [illegible] ([illegible]-[illegible]) [illegible]
[illegible] Bush Negroes [illegible]
[illegible]

484 And after they had inquired of each other's health, they
576 were well past each other, making in opposite directions,
521 but continuing their colloquy.

Bayo said, "I am on my way to the Bakra's camp. I am to be one of his paddlers. Today we start up the river. He is going to the Granman's country."

"I am going to Tunkshai. My sister's son died on the Marowyne. His wife is to come out of mourning. We shall have good dancing tonight."

Bayo's boat was disappearing in the bend of the river.

"Adiosi, adiosi-o. Adiosi, adiosi-o!" he sang out his goodbye, pitching his voice so low and so well that it seemed to penetrate not only the entire river, but the very thickness of the forest which hemmed it in. The response came back to him as a faint, cadenced song.

"Ooo oo oo . . . oo!" he sang out, placing his hand against his mouth to make the sound carry. And the answering call came back true as a bird's call.

484 Now he was in the rapids again, and stood at the stern with dilated nostrils and head thrown forward. When he was through the whirling eddies and in quieter water once more, he adjusted his loin cloth carefully and sat down and [139] began paddling. The green-heart trees were beginning to bloom. Fine trees. They belonged to another clan. He and his great-grandfather went for their timber below. There was plenty of timber in this bush of theirs. The gods of the bush were strong, and the ancestors had done well for the country. In a week these channels would be gone. Right about him everywhere jagged rocks would show. In a week, or before then, they would play the drums for the gods of the river, sounding their call to the sun to come and dry and warm them, and the sun, hearing the call, would send his fire to the river banks, and the rains would end.

Was that a boat overtaking him? The cool of the morning was a time to be about. Who was that?

"Tio, greetings," he said to the man, who seemed in a [576] great hurry.

"Thank you, tio. . . ."

Ah, but they knew each other. 484

Bayo began paddling faster to keep up with him.

"There is to be a council meeting at Gankwe. I had to 623 hurry away last night, and I must get back there in time. 775 We must have permission from the spirit of the dead man to go back to work, and Sedefo has to find out if he can start up the river, and if he does go, we must all pray to the ancestors because four men will be going from Gankwe, and [792] the *Gran Sembe*—the village elders—have things to decide . . . "

Now, fearing that he might have said too much, he doubled his speed, and Bayo understood that the other preferred to be alone. They belonged to different clans, Bayo to the same as the headman of the tribe, and the Gankwe people to another. Gankwe was sending important men to take the Bakra up the river. The chief's own brother, Asikanu, was to go, although it was said he was [684] being sent out of the way while his adultery case was being settled. There had been talk about this case up and down the river. The Gankwe clan head had given a chief's [778] sanctuary to the offender because he was his own brother, people said. Well, if the injured husband committed suicide as he threatened, and sent a kunu to the family of the brother, and even the village and clan, it would be an ugly thing. But so it was with trouble about women. It was as they said,

> "*Sleep is death*
> *Woman kills man.*" [538]

He half chanted the proverb and smiled, for he looked 831 forward to his trip up the river with an eye to a visit in Lamé, where the women knew how to love. And he began singing the seketi song which he liked so well. Both the melody and the words were old, but he sang the refrain as if it were quite his own—whatever hardships there were on the river, at Lamé one slept with the women!

At the village of Akunkun an old man and a boy of 484 about nine were at the landing place ready to start. Bayo

484 recognized the coat of a village chief, and by the size of the
[501] boat he knew that it belonged to the upper river, far, far
beyond the stretches he had yet penetrated.

He spoke the greeting in the faintest of whispers, out of
576 deference to a man of age and rank, and stopped his boat,
484 for this village belonged to his own clan, and it was here
that he would get from his mother's sister the cassava
[262] bread which she had got ready for his journey up river.
He got out of his boat gently; decorum demanded that he
subdue his energy before the man of position. His palms
rested on his knees for an instant, as he stood slightly
[516] inclined before the older man, and what questions he
answered, he did in speech which was punctuated with the
ceremonial stammering demanded by the occasion. He had
put his toga-like cloth over him and stood hesitating
whether or not to take his paddle to the village with him,
for he was so well known here that this settlement was
almost as familiar to him as his own. But at last he leaned
down and took up his paddle. This mature formality, in a
village where he was still often looked upon as a boy, was
prompted perhaps by this meeting with the chief, or by
the new feeling of confidence he had, since he was taking the
Bakra's boat up the river. But here he was, going up the
embankment with the firm, slow step of the stranger.

484 The old chief had already started, having first made his
182 sacrifice of rum to the spirit of his boat by squirting it over
[501] the finely carved head which appeared in relief on the
622 prow. And now, as he guided his canoe with the sure strokes
539 of his large steering paddle, he sang his prayer.

"*Kediamo, Kediampon,*
Mother of the River,
Sacred ancestors, and my a'ka,
I am taking this journey down the river,
I am going to the city,
Grant that I travel in safety,
Grant that the trip be joyous,
Grant that I meet with friends,

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782
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Grant that I walk with strangers in friendship,
Grant that the white man deal fairly with me.
Great Sky God,
Mother of the River,
Sacred ancestors,
I thank you."

Before the sound of the old chief's voice had died away, 484 Bayo was on the bank again with the great disks of cassava bread in his arms. He covered them carefully and was on his way. His aunt had provided nicely for him. She had given him a large bottle of palm oil as well, and now, if he could but shoot a monkey or a macaw while going up the river, he [862] would have excellent food. The Bakra would be certain to have a drink or two for his paddlers, and some leaf tobacco; and, though he himself was not old enough to snuff tobacco, he would save it for a gift to the father of his betrothed.

He went back to his seketi.

"Ma, a Lamé
A sib' ko' de muye."

On the bank of the next village several women were at work washing clothes. Were they young? Ah, but he must hurry. Twice he had been overtaken.

"Tia, odi! tia, odi! tia, odi!" He spoke to each of the three women separately and finished his "Adiosi" with an extra flourish, for he knew as he paddled away that the circle of cicatrized kamemba and the snake incised in the small of his back below it would gleam in the sun and look alive to the women who watched him make off.

That Lamé obia was a powerful thing!

2

At Gankwe they had been up all night, for yesterday was 765 the eighth day after death, and that night the ceremony of B'oko Dei had to be cared for—until night met day, the villagers said, there would be Anansi stories, and then, after the dawn, the elders would hold council, for one's

765 head was clearest in the quiet of the early morning. A
stillness so pronounced that we could feel it surrounded us
at the base camp, for at Gankwe the drums had been
replaced in the shrines of the gods for whom they speak,
and no more guns saluted the spirit of Zimbi, or warned
away the evil dead with the powder which was distasteful
to ghosts. Zimbi was buried, the grave diggers had bathed
[183] and put on fresh loin cloths, the village had been purified,
and all was still.

512 From our shelter, watching the haze lift, we could see
that the river had fallen; the tangled grasses at the
bank showed fully a hand's breadth of fresh brown that
had the day before been under water. With the coming of
the sun things began to stir. The lizards appeared, the
[831] chickens came to peck at our shoes, looking for crumbs, and
boats began to make shadows across the opposite bank, as
the Gankwe women in their small corials went to their
fields. At the bow would be a little girl, or a yet smaller
[868] boy—as young as four perhaps, for the older ones went
with the men to learn a man's work—helping to take the
boat up the fast water. All this went on quietly, until we
espied three boats running down the rapids and pivoting
about in the still water toward our landing place. As they
438 came nearer, we could see that the boats carried no load,
and our host, the director of the balata-collecting station,
explained that these boats were new and were being taken
down river for sale.

"All the large boats come from top-side," he said.
"The men take them clear around to the Marowyne River
by way of the canals and there carry loads in them to the
stations in the interior. The Saramacca men are fine canoemen.
They like them on the Marowyne. . . . You could
439 use a large boat for your trip up river. Maybe the man will
sell one."

[142] The man in charge of the little flotilla stood more than
[304] six feet tall. His face was intricately cicatrized, and he
carried himself with a dignity and reserve that surpassed
even the way of the village chiefs.

Seeing him, our host gave an exclamation of pleasure. 439
"But this is Ajako, the husband of Granman Yankuso's daughter!"

"*Kuma, Bakra. Kuma, Bakra muye*—Good morning, 576
white man, good morning, white woman," he said, and our answer was, "*Ajako, kuma*—Ajako, good morning."

Had we awakened, so? This, in the Saramacca idiom, was how one asked if we were well, if we were alive, since the euphemism for death is sleep. We answered him in their patterned phrase.

"*Hafu so*," we said, using their equivalent for fairly well, only half so.

Ajako laughed. The white man had learned. "Are you no better? I hear the gods like you well," he replied.

And so the conversation went on, each giving account of himself.

Finally Ajako said, "Granman Yankuso waits for you, 648
Bakra. He sends you his greetings, and says he will welcome you in Asindopo Lantiwe, his village. You have the freedom of the river. The village chiefs know of your coming. They will receive you. The river is not too high now, for top-side the rains are at an end. Here on the lower river, too, rocks that today are under water will appear tomorrow or the next day. The water is not too high now. The Granman sends word to you that you can start."

But what of him? Would he not come with us as our chief paddler, to show us the way through the many channels? But he smiled and said he was going to the
Marowyne. He could not turn back, he told us, for he had 221
the boats to sell, and money to earn there, while his wife 854
was nursing her infant. When the child was seventeen, eighteen months old, then he would be back with his wife again, cutting new fields for her, and making children. While the infant was at the breast, he would be away working.

There was more talk, leading gently—*safri*, softly, as the 648
Bush Negro himself says—to the subject of certain unfriendly villages. There were two of them up the river that

648 had not acted well toward the Granman. It would be best if we did not stop there. At the others the Granman could assure us hospitality. Then there was talk of hauling wood and making rafts, for our host, who knew these people well, moved safri, too, until he at last felt the moment had come to talk about buying a boat from Ajako.

[439] 123 126 When the arrangements of the sale were concluded, Ajako came back to talk with us. He had heard that we had a machine which the Kromanti spirit had broken, was it true? Did it really go again? They said the Bakra had much cunning. They said the Bakra knew African magic.

The Bakra said he knew something about Africa. The Ashanti people, for instance, were a fine people.

124 186 115 "*Ma na Asante, na Sa'macca sem-* . . . —But the Ashanti are Saramacca. . . ." But he would go no further, having spoken only one syllable of the word for people. He became guarded. Yes, there were some Anago people from Africa on this Saramacca River, and Dahomey, and Loango, and Fanti; the Ibo peoples were not on this river. . . . And again he would say no more. Later, when we had changed the subject, he said as if in both gratitude and explanation, "*Na sa-i-'akisi, a tranga goi*—You ask about strong things."

126 115 But he would sing into our machine, if we liked. He would sing Kromanti, if we wanted him to do so. "I won't fight your machine," he said, smiling.

[533] [534]

"*Anabobi, Anabobi,*
Anabobi, Anabobyo,
Tata Ando.
Anabobi, Ando,
Anabobi,
Tata Adjaini,
Anabobyo
Tata Fa'aku."

"They will understand this in Africa," he said, gravely, and then he moved toward the doorway and stood there

looking out on the river. Whether it was a gesture that he 136
would sing no more, or not, we could not say, but when he 115
turned again to us he looked thoughtful. "White man, how far away is *Africa?* Would they kill me if I went there? Could I get a woman, if I went there?"

We sent him some food to his boat as an expression of 609
hospitality, and word came back that when we had done 576
eating, he would himself come and thank us. When he did 431
come, it was to speak his thanks and to say goodbye, and he did not come alone. With him was the young man who was his traveling companion, and this young man carried gifts to us. Bayo, who had arrived a short time before, received the gifts of fig bananas and rice for us, as was the custom of these people, for to have given or received a gift in person would have been the way of a boor, just as it would have been bad form to stand about and watch us eat.

The leave-taking ritual, as that of greeting, is as formalized as a litany and almost as solemn.

"*Adiosi, adiosio—waka bon, yere. Tan bon*—Goodbye, travel well, hear? Keep well." Ajako carefully laid away his top cloth in his woven closed basket, straightened his loin cloth, and paddled away briskly from the landing.

Later, boats pulled up bringing the Gankwe men.

"Sedefo, we have a fine boat for you. It's large, and it 501
will take a great deal of load. It's a new boat, just come 609
down from top-side."

The men busied themselves with bringing our provisions from the shelter to the landing place so that the loading might begin. A tent had been made of palm leaves for the boat in which we ourselves were traveling, so that we might be shielded from the glare of the open river, from sunstroke and the sudden tropical downpours, and the men decided to load this boat first.

Now there was a murmur among the Gankwe men. Sedefo was passing his hands over the new boat, as though it were a human form, touching its "head," running his hands over the "ribs," the "belly." Then he balanced himself in it, and shook his head.

501
609 "It is not good," he said aloud to us. "Its balance is not right. Look, it rolls . . . and besides, I have a kunu. I will go up in my own boat."

And so it was. Sedefo took his own boat up river, and another Gankwe boat was obtained, and there were four boats instead of three, and eight paddlers instead of six.

"Ya-hai! Kunu is costly for the white man as well as the black," Bayo said to Bibifo, his great-grandfather, for it was not his father, nor his grandfather, as he had later promised, who appeared to steer the boat in which Bayo was taking the Bakra and his woman up the river.

3

502
484 Bayo was at his best on the river. He loved it, and it treated him well. In the prow of the boat, swinging his pole-stick hand over hand, he steadily urged the boat upstream against the current, and sang as he poled.

[533]
[539]

"*A-yai-yo,*
A-yai-yea,
Money is finished in Suriname
Lower Cayenna took it!
A-yai-yo,
A-yai-yea."

[533] Over and over he repeated the seketi, with tantalizing variations in rhythm and melody on the traditional air, to which he knew so many sets of words. In and out went the pole-stick. In, until it struck the sand with a soft caressing glide, then a hard push, and three short steps back along the boat until Bayo's hand reached the upper end of the wood, and a final thrust, then pull, and over, and in, and once again the three short steps.

The other boats had got ahead. In the distance close to the bank they followed one another.

"*Mbwogu, mbwogu*—Hurry!" said old Bibifo in back.

Bayo turned and grinned. "*Ai, mbwogu, mati, mbwogu*—Yes, hurry, friend, hurry," he twitted his great-grandfather,

but he did face about, and forgetting his seketi began 502
to pole in earnest. 484

In a few moments his body glistened with the exertion,
and over the circle and snake of kamemba in the small of
his back the perspiration ran down in a trickle. When he 484
had almost caught up he slackened his speed, and he and
Bibifo talked about the river. Old Bibifo knew the river
well. He was born beyond the Granman's country. A
snake swam across the path of the boat, Bayo said.
It was good luck. "See, look," he called. His eyes were [825]
sharp. The old man saw it, too, and then he called to us. [777]
There, close to the shore, a little ahead of us, a constrictor
twined its tail about a liana, hanging head down, with a [136]
salamander slowly disappearing into its mouth. There was
a slight jerk, the liana shook, the snake swallowed, and
another bit of the salamander was out of sight.

Farther ahead we heard the report of a gun, and the
crying of the mate of the wounded bird followed us for a
long while. Bayo and Bibifo identified each cry, called by
name the things that grew, planned about their timber
rafts when they got back, until the next rapids were
reached and passed and the conversation could be resumed,
and then they talked about things which they did not care
to have the Bakra know, and though they spoke none of
the words of their ritual language, we could not understand [198]
anything they said. It was not until later that we learned to
work out some of the elisions in their speech.

A strip of sandy beach showed where a village stood, and 778
as we passed it, we could see the azang, the spiritual guard 789
of palm fronds, preventing evil spirits from entering the
village. We saw also a strip of white hanging from the end
of a stick which had been put up for the ancestors, and
beyond, the low shelter for the roughly carved and weathered
image holding an obia pot on its head. Under the
azang the path stretched like a narrow ribbon which was
soon lost as the walls of green converged.

"Is that another village?" we said, pointing at a pale 361
stretch across the river.

361 "This is the entrance to the farm of a Gankwe family. And there, can you see? That's a broken village. Many people died there. The others left it. This happened when Bayo was small."

4

805 "How many hours, Bakra?" Bayo asked. He could tell time by the sun and guessed almost exactly. "They are stopping on the rocks there. It's time to eat."

264 The Bush Negro usually has two meals a day, one in the early forenoon and another at night after dark when work is over. He eats little. These men were on the river with us ten or eleven hours a day, poling upstream, loading and unloading the boats where the rapids were so high that it was impossible to take the heavily loaded boats across them, and what we saw them eat was some cassava bread [262] dipped in river water to soften it, and some cold rice with a little palm oil in it. They had no time to fish, and it was a bad year for fishing, too. Of game there was little. [224] A few toucans and a monkey were all they could get along the shore—game was scarce even in the deep bush. For more than a score of decades their ancestors had been shooting game along the river, and now the animals kept away.

In the other boats Asikanu was the first served.

"Look, here is your food."

The front paddler put a calabash filled with rice and some cassava bread on the water, and the stream carried it to Asikanu.

"Did you catch it?"

"Ai."

484 In Sedefo's boat the cassava cakes were green with mold. 261 One by one these disks of a finger's breadth in thickness and perhaps thirty inches in diameter were laid on the hot rocks to dry. On a trip such as this, enough must be taken to feed a man during his entire absence from home. Well in advance a man's wife, or his mother or sister, or a maternal aunt will be told of such a trip so that she may

have the necessary time to prepare the cassava. A man 484
cannot count on finding food to buy. Food is often scarce 061
and, especially when crops have not been good—a state of affairs these Bush Negroes know only too well—each household has need of all the food it has grown.

Asikanu, whose cassava bread was fresh, bathed in the 515
river and changed his dripping loin cloth, spreading out 484
the one he had removed so that it might dry. Bayo washed his second best cloth, for the sun was strong, and it was well to get it fresh and uncreased. So the men busied themselves getting their supplies in order for the journey which was not yet taxing, but would grow more difficult during the next few days, with heavy rapids, great distances between villages, and more exertion needed to strike a village before dark overtook them.

Even so it was time to be off, Sedefo decided, replacing 502
the cassava cakes—which in a few moments had lost their 484
mold—for the next rapids were something to be reckoned with. Again the four dugouts were on their way, and it was a brave sight to see the four pole-men swinging their long sticks with measured regularity, and the upward leaping three steps, and the down-running steps, and the seated paddlers dipping their carved blades into the water with a slight twist at the end of each stroke to counteract the effect of the push of the man at the bow, to keep the canoe headed straight into the current.

Ahead, in the leading canoe, the man at the bow waved [201]
his hand to us, indicating directions to our men. We could see him put the whole length of his pole in the water three times, then lay it along the gunwale of his dugout and, taking up his paddle, begin to stroke in time with the man at the stern of his boat.

"*Mfundu,*" said Bayo to Bibifo. "Deep."

As we approached the deep water, Bayo with a fillip of his paddle sent our dugout heading into the stream, to be caught up by the current at the center and taken down and across by the impact of the water against the boat. The boats in front had done the same, had cut across to the

502 484 other bank, and now as we reached the opposite shore, we saw the small opening of a minor channel which we were to take. With astonishing nicety the tip of the juncture of the main stream and this smaller channel was reached at the same instant. Loin cloths were adjusted, and once more the pole-men took up their pole-sticks and continued the slow passage against the current.

484 The boats were now again traveling close to the bank, so that the details of the forest which fringed the river could be clearly seen. Straight from the water rose the [133] wall of sheer green, all of a dark, almost dull purplish color—a wall of fifty, a hundred, a hundred and fifty feet and more, as the lianas dropped down from the upper branches of the great trees which gave these parasitic growths their support. Here and there we saw a brilliant wing of a bird, and a Bush Negro, ever ready to augment [411] his meager food supply, would unlimber an ancient shotgun, steady himself, and shoot. In Sedefo's canoe, Angita, his pole-man, saw a blue and golden macaw silhouetted as it sat on a slender branch. Out came the shotgun. The macaw, startled but unhit, flew to another branch farther upstream. We crept slowly, noiselessly ahead, and when we were close by Angita shot again, and missed again. The macaw now did not trouble to fly away, and when Angita made aim once more, Sedefo stopped him.

[825] "No, mati—Let him be, friend. The gods are protecting him. Put away your gun."

Again we cut across, as we regained the wide channel, this time so that the men might speak their errand to the spirit of their great ancestor, the god of the large creek. We did not go too close, however, and all we could see was an azang again, the spiritual guard of palm fronds, and beyond the whitened trunk of a tree and a slender stick with a bit of white cotton attached to its end.

Sedefo spoke conversationally. "*Avo*—ancestor—we are [782] going up the river. We are working for the American Bak'a. We are on our way to the G'ama's country. Grant

that we walk the Bak'a with pleasure, that he treat us 484
well, that we walk in safety. Thank you." [082]

The men in the other canoes, who had gathered about Sedefo's boat, clapped their hands, as Sedefo had done, and said "Thank you," then took up their paddles.

We had noticed that when Sedefo spoke, Bibifo's lips had moved, as though he were either repeating the prayer, or speaking his own, but when the others joined in the voiced "Gran' tangi!" he was silent.

"Did you pray, Bayo?" we asked. Yes, he had. He had prayed for us, too. Did Bibifo also pray for the white man? But before Bibifo could answer, Bayo laughed aloud.

"Bibifo is *kerki suma*—a church man. Call him Adrian, it will please him. I call him Bibifo, nothing else."

"And you, Bayo?"

"I—you will take me with you to Africa. I want to learn [152]
African obia, and come back to the Saramacca, and be a
big obia man here on the river."

5

Old Bibifo accepted his great-grandson's jibes with good 888
humor. We were sorry for the old fellow who was so little at 522
ease with the other men, and was so mercilessly twitted by 578
the youngster in the bow.

If the old man were to make a suggestion to him about a
channel which Bayo had decided against, then he would
turn brazenly, and exclaim, "Massa cow!" This is part
of the proverb which says that a man who owns the cow [538]
has the best right to say where it shall graze. If Bibifo
objected when Bayo attempted to do something that
seemed impossible, he would face about smilingly and say,
"The power which has raised the monkey from the ground
and taught it to live safely in the trees is not dead yet."

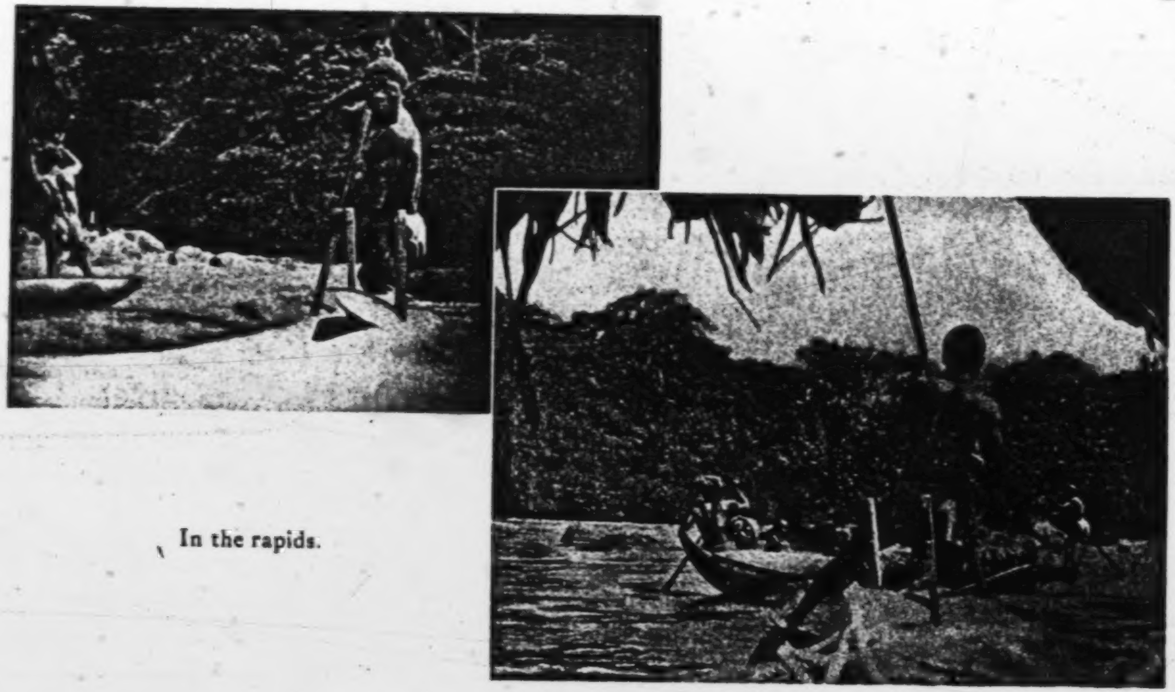
"Bibifo," we said, making conversation with the old man, "Why do we go close to the shore?"

"In the center the current is swift and the river deep. 502
When we go in the center, then we use only paddles. It is 484

1: Herskovits & Herskovits E-5 (1928-1929) 1934
SR8 Bush Negroes SR8
Saramacca

501
391

[Facing P. 58]



In the rapids.

(Facing page 58)

502 484 too deep for the pole-stick. When we go in the center, it is slow. . . . *Koti go!*—Cut across!" he shouted in his shrill voice, as our boat and the others after us veered over to the other side of the stream where the current was less strong.

"How do you know just where these places are?" we asked. "There are so many channels, so many islands. How can you tell?"

"*Ma, kye!* What would you? I belong to this bush. An old man knows his river."

Steadily the boats went ahead in this long, quiet stretch. For fully half an hour the men worked in silence, doggedly going upstream close to the bank, until under the shade of a tree they saw a boat resting.

"Tio, odi! Tio, odi!" Each of our men addressed the two in the boat.

[576 609] "Tangi, tio! Tio, odi," they answered each one, until finally they said, "Odi, Bak'a," greeting the stranger last, as was the custom.

Our men explained, "We are going to the Saramacca country, up the river to the Granman. We are carrying the Bakra to the Granman. They belong to America country. They traveled in a fire ship for twenty-one nights and days to come to the Saramacca. Twenty-one nights and days, mati, without resting. *G'an sundyi*—A great state of affairs."

The man said, "We come from the Marowyne. The river is high. The next rapids are difficult. Let us travel together."

And so we were five canoes. Ahead, we could already hear the dull murmur which would soon crescendo to the final roar. This was the water pouring over the first rocks in the distance.

"What rapids are these?"

[823 796] "We must not talk about this here. Wait until we pass them. If we speak the name, the spirit will come, and he will be angry. The boat might go over. We might lose part of our load."

Now we came closer to the line of white, which rose higher and higher. Except for the bits of white foam like saliva coming downstream, the water below the rapids gave in its calmness little hint of the turbulence beyond. The boats gathered for a discussion. 502 484

"This is the best place."

"No, here."

"There, to the side."

The bow men had jumped out and were reconnoitering, shouting at each other from their respective rocks. At last the strangers' ideas prevailed. At the side was best, there, close to the shore, but an overhanging branch or two would have to be struck off. Bayo swam back to our boat to get his machete and, wading up the stream along the bank, slashed at the obstruction. He struck again, and the limb bent, struck once more, and down it fell, coming toward us with lightning rapidity as it was caught by the full force of the current.

"Look out, look out!" Sedefo shouted, as the jagged point made for the boat of the strangers. But the men had already perceived the danger to their canoe, and one of them had jumped into the water and caught at some twigs, diverting the main branch so that it only grazed the side.

Now all was clear, and they were ready to start. The heaviest boat, that of the strangers, would be the first to go. Both the men in it took up poles and, with a firm shove, their boat was in the thick of it.

"Ha'i! ha'i!" they cried, and first the prow man would force the boat slowly forward, and then would hold the advantage he had gained while the pole-man in the stern caught his stick in the rocky bottom and pushed with a force that bent the strong wood.

Our men stood by, ready to help.

"The boat is slipping!" Sedefo cried.

And it was true. Into the roaring water jumped Bayo and Angita, and swam out to reach the boat which was losing more and more ground and might at any instant crash downwards. Balancing themselves on the slippery rocks, half wading, half swimming, they grasped its sides and pulled in unison with the pole-man's urging "*Hali!*

502 484 *hali, ba!*—Haul! haul, brother!" Now they had stopped its backward motion. "Hali!" Now the boat gained headway. "Hali!" And this time the prow tilted clear over the top of the rapids and, with another push and another, it was in the still water above.

Three men and not two returned to take our boat, for we were next, being next heaviest, and only one man was needed to keep the boat that had been through the dangerous stretch in its place in the quiet water. In climbed Bayo, and Sedefo took the old man's position. Into the water jumped the other two, this time swimming through the fast water farther away from shore to where some rocks projected from the white foam. For Sedefo had different ideas about the best passage. We were, in fact, to try to make it where the force of the water was greatest, near the center of the stream.

"*Koti go! Okai no mo, okai no mo!*—Cut across! Cut over more, more!" shouted Sedefo as we headed across and down the river toward a partly submerged rock.

"Massa Nengere, 'kai no mo!"

"Kai, kai, mati!"

With a grunt, he pushed in his pole-stick just as we reached it, holding fast as the boat swung about, and Bayo once more dug among the rocks on the bottom to obtain a fresh grip.

"*Okai, okai!*—Turn, turn!" he shouted above the noise of the water. The cries were frantic, but Sedefo knew the river too well for it to trick him, and as the head of the boat was about to be caught and swirled broadside against another rock, the first of the men from the other boats caught it and righted it about. It was as he had planned.

"Hali!" and, with four pairs of strong arms tugging, we could feel the pull as the boat went forward amid the white-capped water. "Hali!" and the quiet of the river above the falls could be seen just beyond the prow. "Hali!" and we, too, were in still water.

The old man again took his place in our boat, and Sedefo went back to bring his own dugout through. The three smaller boats were to be brought up each by its own men. Each selected a place, and the shrill shouted directions could be heard above the falling water. Up, up, they came, the man at the stern holding with his stick, the man at the head up to his shoulders in water, tugging, pulling, hauling the boat over. Once Asikanu's pole slipped, and his boat swung toward a rock, but it caught again and he held it with the fierceness of a man defending himself against an enemy, and then he, too, cut across and found the firmness of the friendly sandy bottom. 502- 484

But when the five boats were at last together above the falls, out came machetes to sharpen the ends of the pole-sticks, for an encounter such as they had had the moment before shredded the hard wood into fiber.

Ahead the water was still. The hard work of this day was over. The men straightened their loin cloths and again began to make their way along the banks of the river. The village where we would camp that night was somewhere before us. The sun was nearing the treetops, and the shrieking pairs of parrots were flying over us to the west, seeking their roosting places. [136]

The short dusk was upon us.

"It is not far," said Bayo, speaking of the village ahead.

"Will we get there before dark?"

"*Massa Gadu sabi*—God alone knows."

"*No fe', Bak'a*—Don't be afraid. We know the river."

The Bush Negro and his river! Seeing the prodigious strength of the men, their great knowledge of current and rocks and channels, one was not afraid. Softly the pole-sticks slid into the sand banks, softly the paddles dipped, and Bayo sang his seketi.

"N'an g'wa a Lamé [533]
A s'ib' ko' de muye." [539]

Chapter IV

KUNU

I

501
822
EVENTS on the river, as it turned out, showed Sedefo's fears of the large boat that rolled, and of his kunu, only too well grounded. It was to him that there occurred the only mishaps of the entire up-river journey. That what happened proved to be no more serious was, according to the general understanding of our men, to be credited to that personal boat of Sedefo's, whose spirit he had tried on many journeys, and had propitiated with offerings of sacred rum and prayer.

It was also whispered among our men that the Bakra's magic from Africa—a wholly imaginary thing, but which explained to the Bush Negroes our ability to do or withstand things that were not expected of us—had something to do with it, too. For kunu was kunu, and the one in Sedefo's family had shown its hand but too many times of late. Had not the family lost another man only a few months earlier? Had not Zimbi just been buried? And Zimbi's wife, dead less than a year before.

Thanks, then, to his boat, Sedefo's life had been spared. It was not for nothing that he had taken every care when making this boat, that before he had felled the log out of which he had made it, he had addressed himself to the spirit of the tree, explaining that he had need [782] of its wood for a boat, that he would therefore cut it down. He had rendered his thanks for the spirit's permission, as was needful, and since then he had often made prayer to his boat, and the boat had carried him safely. 501 822 [183]

But this is what happened.

On our fourth day up the river we were on our way early, because the men said the falls ahead were difficult, and they wanted to be through them before they stopped to eat. It took us more than an hour to pass the rapids, for the land rose higher and higher, and the water cascaded from one ledge to the next, often in curving channels of swift water that were too deep to allow the use of pole-sticks, and too swift for the paddles to cope with. 502 489 [133]

There were also those stretches which were without the piled rocks to give the men a footing for pulling the boats over, so that a rope had to be used, and the going was slow and treacherous. Each of the dugouts had this long rope fastened to its prow, and ahead, on the first ledge, were two or more of the men, the other end of the rope in hand, waiting for the signal to start hauling, while holding on to the sides of the boat as they swam were as many men as could be spared, so that if the rope broke, the boat would not be swept downstream, to go crashing against the rocks. These men who faced the fast water of their river, worked as though at the sight of it their Kromanti fighting spirit had entered their bodies, as if not men were there, but an impersonal force pitting itself against the force of the river. Even where the water was not too deep, and they could haul the boat, care could not be slackened for an instant—a wrong turn, and the boat would be capsized, or, what would be as serious, the impact of a rock might cut a gash in its side or bottom, filling it with water faster than they could manage to bring it to a bank. But at last the sound of the falling water was behind us, and the men, once they were in the still water again, went on with the casualness that they fell into with their river when the danger was over, and cast about for a pleasant place to stop and eat.

All at once there was a shout from behind us. Each boat echoed it shrilly. What's that? Whose boat?

502 484 931 It was Sedefo's boat, there in the distance, tilted to one side in what looked to us like still water. The other canoes turned and paddled furiously to reach him, but he had righted his boat before they could come alongside him, and was off down the river to recover what he had lost. The water had claimed the basket back of the tarpaulin-covered load, and a carved paddle which had slipped off when the canoe tilted. The basket belonged to Sedefo. It held his food for the journey up river and the downgoing. The paddle was also his—the finest he had—and had been intended for ceremonial usage when he called as spokesman for us on village heads asking for a night's hospitality, and particularly at the Granman's village, and still later on the way home, when he brought political messages in behalf of his clan to friendly clans along the way he passed. He also lost his best cloth; it was not just a piece of striped cotton a man bought in the white man's store; it had been patiently and dexterously pieced together from many pieces [291] of cloth, plain and striped, in a pattern which was known to the ancestors. His young second wife had made it for him. Her first child was an infant at her breast. When she heard about this, she would think of Sedefo's kunu, and be afraid. Was it so big a kunu that it would punish a child of his wife's family, too?

This is what the men said while the boats waited for Sedefo to return from his vain search down the rapids. The [776] men had not expected him to recover the things lost. When kunu took, there was nothing that could be done. And it was kunu. The *Bakra-sani*—the white man's things—had remained in the boat unharmed! We looked at the few rocks against which the boat had crashed. They showed plainly above the water, and the current about them made so small a break in the still water that the spirit of this ruffled piece had never disclosed its name, had never before received notice. The three other canoes had gone through without even the grunts from the paddlers which came when the going was hard, for all that was necessary was to go straight for the rocks, let the current swing the boat around, give a strong thrust with the pole-stick, and the 502 canoe was through—a bit of child's play. 484 731

We were soon again to see Sedefo's kunu strike. This time it was almost at dusk. The men, it appeared, would not be able to make the village we had planned on for the night. In half an hour it would be dark, and here we were fully two hours' fast traveling from our intended destination. Overhead clouds were coming up from the east. The sky was rapidly becoming overcast. Rain—and everywhere the impenetrable wall of green, rising dark and forbidding. To make camp where we were would have taken at least two hours, and it was growing darker and darker. The men refused to clear the underbrush in the dark.

It seemed, however, that five minutes upstream on the opposite bank and only a little to the south of where we had stopped to talk things over was a village, the name of which when we heard it we recognized as one of the two we had been asked not to visit. There was nothing to do but to brave the displeasure of the Granman and stop there; so turning we headed our boats toward the opposite shore.

In midstream a great wind came up, a wind that in [132] suddenness and force is only met in the tropics. The men shrieked and shouted and struggled until our boats reached shore. But Sedefo's boat, which was the second, seemed to be lifted bodily out of the water. We could see a black mass being heaved up . . . the black tarpaulin was overboard going downstream, and Sedefo after it.

The wind subsided as quickly as it had sprung up, and when Sedefo came back sometime later, he carried the dripping tarpaulin on his head. He did not drink the rum we gave to warm him, but poured it over his hands and [788] his boat as an offering.

The next day we talked with Bayo about kunu. 502

"Why is it, Bayo, that Sedefo lost his food in the still 484 water? Was it because he felt safe and didn't take care in 772 such small rapids?"

"No," he said promptly, "that's how kunu works. A man travels on the river all his life. He goes over small

502 484 996 rapids and large rapids. He carries loads and returns to his own village. But then something happens. His boat is good. He walks *koni*—carefully—but he loses his food, or his entire load, or his boat, or even his life. Something is working against him. It might be *wisi*—bad magic; it [059] might be kunu. If you have kunu, then your enemies can make their bad magic work against you. So it is."

"But what is kunu, Bayo?"

He hesitated.

124 996 We assured him that there was no harm in our asking. We had been hearing so much about it, first about Zimbi, and how he had died from a cut with his machete. Now this machete had worked for him since he was a boy, and then he cut himself, and then, having cut himself, he became sick and died. People said down below this was kunu. What did it mean?

But he still hesitated and looked about him until at last when he spoke, he gave the answer we were coming to know so well—"*Massa Gadu sabi*—God knows"—that answer that was the signal that not alone Massa Gadu, but the one who invoked his name in protection against Bakra questions, knew the answer quite well but meant to keep his own counsel. For to talk of these matters is not good, we had been told before by Sedefo.

It was Bibifo who brought up kunu again when Bayo stepped out of the boat for an instant.

"Better not talk to Bayo about kunu, Bakra. There is a very big kunu in Bayo's family. He does not mean to lie to the Bakra when he doesn't talk, but it is better for him not to tell you about it. We Saramacca people say: 'A snake bit me. I see a worm, I am afraid.' Do not ask him more."

2

538 But the Bush Negro has many sayings, and it was a different proverb from that which Bibifo had quoted to us that guided us in our tortuous course in search of an understanding of kunu.

KUNU

"*Na wa' taki: Efi gbuli wolo, i sa si san de na ini.*—It is said: If a person stirs up a hole, he will find what is in it." 538

And so it was that very night, when we were camped on an island near the great falls, with the roar of the water sounding in our ears like the very signal drums we were told the river gods wanted sounded that the sun might come and warm and dry them after the long rains, that we learned more. Kasanya, the captain of the fourth boat, had conducted himself so unobtrusively that we barely knew he was there. He was almost as old as Bibifo, but strangely silent. He was tall and spare, with graying hair, and eyes that were rimmed with red. We had not sought him out particularly to make conversation with him because he had ugly, open sores on his body, the result of a virulent case of bush yaws, which showed when he sat paddling in his loin cloth. We had known him during our first year when he had been more willing to be friendly, more ready to talk. From him, in fact, we had learned to play one of the Bush Negro games that the ancestors had brought from Africa. 124 [177] [524]

Kasanya came over to ask us whether we had medicine for him. His head ached so until . . . he could barely see. There is that about white man's medicine in the bush, it is to be had free, and there is no harm in trying it. 123 609

"Will you make us a game board like the one we bought from your village last year, Kasanya?" we asked him.

"Yes, but you must have two of them, one flat and one curved like a boat. It is not good to have only one. When a man is alive he plays the game. When he dies and comes back to visit the living, he wants to play, too. Now if there is a board for him, he will play on that. But if there is but the one, he will play with the living and that is not good." 775 524

"You know a great deal, Kasanya."

"Awa, yes, but I'm an old man already. I've had much trouble. Last year after you left the third son I made died. Now I have no one. Kunu has taken the three of them, and my wife is asleep, too." [776]

524 The man looked so moved by what he told us that we had qualms about continuing the conversation with him about his dead family, and so we asked him about the game board. "Why is it, Kasanya, that young Amnika of your village said he could not make us a game board, fine carver [322] that he is? You yourself know that the board is just a piece of wood with holes in it for the seeds. It is not beautiful; there are no decorations on it."

765 "It is because he is young. His hair isn't white like mine. 524 Making an adji board is a big thing. It's not a little thing. It is on this we play when the body of the dead lies in the house of mourning to entertain his spirit, his yorka. Only [554] an old man who has lost his wife may make a board for this game which is played for the dead."

"But suppose he did make it?"

[776] "Then he would get a kunu, Bakra," he said with an impatient cluck which was intended to deplore the white man's inability to understand simple things.

776 And so again we came to kunu, and since he himself had brought it up, we decided to stir the hole once more to see what was in it. Kasanya talked with less hesitation than we had come to expect. It is easier for an older man who has had experience with the spirits and knows their ways to talk about the supernatural. He understands what he may and may not do, and then, too, with his greater knowledge he can tell more without offending the spirits who disapprove of a man's telling too great a part of his store.

"Yes, Bakra, kunu is a difficult thing for you, a white man, to understand. But we black people know what brings kunu. Many things bring kunu. Look, I made three children. Fine men all three. One died, the second died, the third died. . . . "

688 This was his story. His wife's mother's brother brought the curse on his family. He had cut a new field, and the trees he had felled and the brush he had cut had been lying for some time, as was proper, that the dead wood might [241] be burned off to clear the ground so that the ash might enrich the soil.

enrich the soil. Now before a field is chosen for cutting, it 688
must be surveyed carefully to see that there are no snakes
to be injured; that no trees which have strong spirits like [824]
the silk-cotton tree, or the parasitic akatasi, will be [825]
destroyed; that no ant hill whether on the ground or
on a tree be disturbed. But Kasanya's wife's mother's
brother was careless, or unlucky. A small ant hill had
escaped his notice.

"The *Akantamasu* god is powerful. It is a bad god," [776]
Kasanya said over and over, making of it a refrain to his
story.

When the ant hill was destroyed, its spirit fixed itself
upon the family. Kasanya's wife's mother became ill, and
although the contents of one obia pot after another were [755]
used up in bathing her with sangrafu and the serabaki and
chembe leaves, she did not get better. Her husband, an
able obia man, made special charms for her to wear about
her neck, and sprinkled her with medicine with the feather
of the sacred ōpete, the vulture, but still her illness kept on.
At last they went to a diviner. To the village of Dahomey [787]
they went, the village where the most powerful obia was 688
lodged, and there she learned that the Akantamasu god [791]
had come to the family. The diviner told her how to serve
the god so that she might have respite—the days that were
sacred to him, the dances she must dance on these days, the
sacrifices to make. They knew that it would never be a
friendly god to them, for it had come as a kunu. There was
more trouble and more. The family gave many offerings,
and the possessed woman danced whenever the spirit seized
her, but soon she died, and the others have been dying
since.

"What happened to the man who destroyed the ant hill? 688
Did he get the Akantamasu gadu?"

"No, not he himself. His mother, and his sister, and his sister's children."

"But why?"

The answer was that kunu worked that way, and he went on to tell us about his sons. The first son had gone to the

688 Marowyne to earn money that he needed for marrying.
He was in good health, and he learned about the river
"*so te*—until . . . " he knew how to travel on the river
safely. But after he had been away only a short time,
word came to Kasanya's village that he was ill, and before
he could be brought home, he died. They brought back his
hair and nail clippings so that his spirit might rest among
[764] his own people. They held a big *dede wosu*—wake—for
him for six days in the village, with the little coffin and the
offerings which were to accompany the spirit, and dancing
and Anansi stories and the adji game, just as though he had
died at home. There were many guns, too. Everything was
done, and the spirit of the dead son was asked to help the
family against the kunu which was brought to them by the
deed of his mother's mother's brother.

The second son died in the bush. His own gun went off
accidentally as he tripped on a hidden liana and killed him,
[789] though Kasanya had provided him with all the hunting
[229] obias a man would want, and he himself had a strong
Kromanti spirit, so that no gun was supposed to have power
to hurt him. The third was married when he died. His boat
went over in the rapids. His body was never recovered.

782 "Tomorrow we shall all go and pray to the Mother of
the River that she carry us well, that our journey be
pleasant, that we reach the Granman's village safely. . . .
There across the river is her shrine."

3

761 It soon became clear that two things dominate the fore-
776 ground of the spiritual life of the bush—death and kunu. In
688 the last analysis, however, the two are perhaps but one
force, for kunu slowly, inexorably, brings death to one
member after another of the offender's kin, and it is largely
the dead ancestors and the gods who are responsible for the
meting out of kunu, in order that the ancient traditions
and beliefs may go on. And so it was that daily, and many
times daily, incidents not of our special seeking arose to
document our knowledge of kunu.

KUNU

We sat one night talking about the neku vine, which is 278
used to poison the streams for fishing, and the ceremonies 226
attending the discovery of a new one, how the ownership
of it is passed on in the female line, and about the songs
which are sung to celebrate the finding, and the feast which
is given at this time.

"Do you use this poison only to catch fish, or does it have other uses?" we asked guardedly.

"Well, sometimes people use it to commit suicide," one
man said. "That is bad. Sometimes a man or a woman will [762]
do it to put a kunu on another's family." He went on to tell
of a man who lately did this. He had been promised the
daughter of a family in this very village when the girl was
a small, small child. It happened that the girl's uncles
found gold in one of the streams, for which the white man
gave them much goods, and now they were big men. Since
the girl's children would inherit much wealth, they wanted
her to be the principal wife of a man of rank. There were
messages back and forth, and council meetings, but the
uncles insisted that the girl return the gifts she had received
—insisted against the advice of many people. So this *kio*, [627]
this young lad, could get his revenge in no other way than
by taking his own life, and sending a kunu to the family. 776
"The next time you come you will probably see the kunu 754
at work. It is always so. Of what use is wealth when the
children begin to die? One year the crops are bad, and you
have to buy food. One year you go from one obia man to the
next to find out why your sister cannot make children. Your
money goes. Kunu is a bad thing."

Another day a woman came to us with a comb to sell. 439
She had heard that we were gathering pieces to put into a
large house where carvings from Africa were being shown,
and she wanted us to have this comb of hers which was [584]
made as a betrothal gift by her husband who was now many
years dead. It was an old comb with several broken tines
and holes bored into it by insects, but the decorated end was
still very beautiful, and we were eager to buy it. When we 439
asked her to explain to us the meaning of the design, she 532

439 said, "It is not a woman and a snake, as you might imagine
532 from this," and she indicated one or two lines of the design.
"We do not carve the snake in my family. We have a
[825 *tchina*—a taboo—against carving snakes, for snakes are
984] our kunu. . . . Years ago my brother went to the French
shore and worked for a white man. The white man asked
825 him to kill a snake, and he was afraid, but the white man
776 laughed at him, and because he had a weak ak'a, because
his soul was not strong, he killed the snake. If he had told
us about it and had sent a piece of the snake, we would have
held a burial, as would have been right. But he did not do
as he should have done, and so now the snake is not a good
spirit for us. We must give it offerings, and dance kunu. It
is bad to have a weak soul. My brother did a bad thing, and
now I and all my children, and my daughters' children, and
their daughters' children on and on will have this kunu."

342 Farther up the river, in the deep interior, we stopped
at the village of Opoku. As we walked to the house of the
village head to give him our greetings, we noticed an
unusually large house. It was a *liba-wosu*, a house with an
upper story, more substantially built than any we passed,
and ornamented with elaborate carvings, as were all per-
342 sonal houses of the men. The owner of it, we heard, had
768 been dead eight months. Four more would need to go by
before it could be entered. It had been owned by a powerful
man, and his belongings were many. We could see some of
them through the openings between the slats which formed
its walls—an apinti drum, magnificently carved, tall
earthen demijohns of rum, boxes, the edge of a metal
canister and a lamp. Inside there were guns, and machetes,
and native carved paddles, and implements.

Our men joked about the contents of the demijohns as
they passed, speculating on the strength of the rum when
the containers were opened, and when we asked about the
house later—whether, for instance, we could not buy the
drum, we were told that the twelve-month interval between
a man's dying and the dividing of his property was not
600 yet passed. When the time came, his brothers and sisters

When the time came, his brothers and sisters
and sisters' children would gather to divide what wealth 428
there was. The greatest share would, of course, go to the 168
brother who would marry the widow, but all the others [587]
would get something.

"And his children, the children he made, would they get anything?"

"Why no, the children he made are his wife's children. They belong to the family of his wife!"

"But suppose he cared for them very much. . . . "

"Then he might have made them some presents now and then when he was alive, but even then some people say it is better not to give them too much. When a man dies his possessions go to his family. If this man's children, who really belong to his wife, were to take things now, they would get a kunu for it, and they might get another kunu which the father had, for if they got his possessions, his kunu would go to them, too, and there would perhaps be one in their own family that had come to them through their mother. No man or woman wants this."

It is kunu, then, which sees to it that the tribal law of succession and inheritance through the female line is not [611] violated.

4

There was the case of Asikanu, our paddler, who was the 115 brother of the head of an important clan, which gave us still another instance of the workings of kunu. Asikanu was, in his own right, not a negligible figure. When his brother died, it might be he who would succeed to the headship of the clan. When the other paddlers wanted things of us, they would come to ask in his name. "It is not a small thing when Asikanu asks," they would say. "He is a big man; he is the brother of our chief. You must not refuse him."

Asikanu had a way with the women, although it would 684 have been best if at least one of them had resisted him. She was married, and, when her husband discovered her infidelity, she went to Asikanu. Now this was as it should

684 [776] be. The Earth Mother, who is the giver of fertility, takes the adulterous woman who is with child under her protection, and no one may harm her. But the guilty man must make redress to the betrayed husband. Fines must be paid by the adulterer, and there is the beating which the husband administers. This beating has its ritual. The culprit, at the time that is set, comes out to the place where the injured husband and his family wait. They attack him with bare fists, although the Kromanti arm obias are sometimes slipped down on clenched hands, and with these serious wounds can be inflicted. With or without the iron arm bands, the beating is a serious matter, and the man who has committed the trespass is severely mishandled, unless he can get away from his assailants and run into the bush. In the bush he has sanctuary, and at the end of some time may come back to his village. The gods will not give a weakling husband, or one who is not clever enough to take his revenge when it is offered, a second chance.

At times this beating is a merry affair. This happens when the adulterer's family tries to protect him, and then the matter becomes a two-family brawl, or, if the village is a [628] large one with more than one clan substantially represented in it, it may become a fight between two clans. Once, in a village near the railhead, a man was killed in such a fight, and then white police stepped in, and the murderer went to prison.

[622] [778] A chief, however, can give the culprit sanctuary, and Asikanu, being a chief's brother, was protected by the chief while negotiations were being carried on in his behalf. Now he was sent away from home to be one of our paddlers so that the enraged husband might be dealt with—time helps to cool anger. This was important in Asikanu's case, since the husband of the woman who had gone to Asikanu would consent to no fine, however large, and seemed, 776 762 684 754 furthermore, to have misgivings about the manner in which the ritual beating would be conducted. "I will kill myself," he had been heard to declare. "I will kill myself, and give them all kunu. My *yorka*—ghost—will come to

trouble them, and I will give the family a kunu, and the 776
clan, too, because the chief has shielded him. I am power- 762
less against the chief. I will kill myself." 684
754

A clan kunu is a thing to dread. It must be averted, whatever the hazards. And so, while they held council at Gankwe with the husband and his family, Asikanu was away with the Bakra. . . .

At Apresina an old woman sent word that she wished to 776
see us. She was so old and so ill that we had to cross half 754
the length of the village to come to her, so that she might see what a white man and a white woman were like.

"Well, how is it in the city?" she asked. "How is it among you whites?"

She had heard, she told us, that everything was quiet in the city, that it was as if people slept night and day. Crops did not grow as they should. People were sick. Was it so? And without waiting for us to answer, she spoke again.

"But it must be so. So many, many black people took their own lives, before the time of running away. There must be kunu there." She assured us that it had to be so. How else but that the children of those whites should pay for the old abuses? . . .

And in the Granman's village we heard of kunu again.

"Do you know what they say in the city?" Granman Yankuso said one late afternoon, addressing several of his favorite village chiefs. "They say we are good men here in the bush, because we believe in kunu. In the city, where they do not believe in kunu any more, they are not afraid to use magic to enrich themselves, or hurt their neighbors. In the city they say that, friends."

There were the usual responses from the chiefs.

"So it is."

"True, true."

"Yes, master of the realm."

We looked out at the shadows across the carved door of the council house, that superb rendering of the Earth Mother and her attendant symbols of procreation and abundance, beyond into the great clearing where we could

776 see the shrines to the ancestors and gods. All about were the
754 many houses of the Granman with the elaborately carved
posts figuring his emblem. Under the shade trees the widow
was pounding rice. She wore old clothes, and, since she
[765] would soon be out of mourning, they were almost in rags.
The mourning band about her hair was also old.

The Granman's eyes must have followed ours, must have seen us study the outlines of the carving, and must have followed us to the shrines and the woman, for his voice changed, and now he repeated in a ruminating voice, "Yes, here we believe in kunu."

[192] "Ya-hai!" was the noncommittal reply from his listeners.

The Granman looked now into the faces of his trusted chiefs. He looked steadily and long, searching in the semidarkness of the house for a betraying expression, as the chiefs sat on the low stools against the farther wall, their faces averted, as was seemly.

"Well, friends, kunu has made an end of my family. Is it not so? But the clan will go on. The clan's rule is not ended. Up and down the river tell them that, friends. Kunu has brought my family to an end. With me our family rule is finished. That is right. But the clan will go on."

The customary interpolations followed each phrase.
Then singly the chiefs took their leave. Rising slowly, after
[576] they had received permission to depart, and with body bent,
their hands touching their knees, each spoke his farewell.

In the light their ceremonially anointed bodies glistened like polished ebony. Swift and straight each made his way down the clearing and into a side path which led to the river, where the boats were fastened.

"Fine men, these," said the Granman to us after a silence. "And you, have you kunu in your country? . . ."

5

776 But even after these and many more instances of kunu had come to us, and even though we had snatched a few sentences of explanation from one man and from another, the essential nature of kunu still eluded us. Was kunu, then,

the vengeance of the gods? Was it conscience? Was it 776
morality? Was it destiny? Was it all of these, traditionalized into one abstract philosophical concept which, for the average Bush Negro, was no more formulated than are the underlying sanctions of any civilization to the vast majority of people who live in it? We sought out Bayo again, Bayo, who had the great kunu, to see what light his own experience would shed.

"Almost everyone has some kind of kunu, Bayo," we said. "Now why is it that Sedefo, who has a kunu, is so careful, while you who, let us say, also have a kunu, seem not to take any notice?"

We had, as a matter of fact, often wondered about this. Why was Bayo so sure on the river? Why did he carry himself like a man so much older than he really was? What was behind his great self-confidence? Was it luck? Was it a temperamental carelessness? We had watched his amazing strength in taking up our boat almost singly through the rapids, for Bibifo was so old that when he tried to hold the boat in the current, his arm could give no steadying power to the paddle, and the pole-stick he was too old to use at all. Was it all his luck? Our luck?

He answered circumspectly. Let us suppose, he explained, 835
that in making him his father and mother had incurred the 588
greatest kunu of all—the kunu that comes from incest. 776
Now, in that case, he, as a child of such a relationship would be a *gomi*, a "child of the earth," for he would belong twofold to the land which was in the possession of his clan, and thus would be doubly a clan member. He would, therefore, be protected by the spirits. For the gods, it appeared, declared a truce with the child of such a union and gave him a pass of free conduct among the world of spirits. But the children of a man such as this . . . but here he stopped.

"You know," he said, with his delightful smile, "A man who has a kunu like that doesn't talk about it. Kunu aren't talked about. He might not get a wife. . . . "

REBEL DESTINY

6

776 115 Fa'aku was chief of his clan. He was a handsome man, with a quick, clever eye, and a reputation for great honesty everywhere on the river. To him we appealed for more light on kunu. We had met him in his village on our way upstream and we had seen him in the tribal council house when we had sat at the great krutu held there by Granman Yankuso. When we stopped again at Fa'aku's village on our way down the river—this village that was so close to Dahomey, the seat of magic—it was evident that the gods favored us. We had come safely through the great rapids. We had stayed at Asindopo Lantiwe in good health, and the spirits had even spoken for us through some of the women whom they had possessed. Fa'aku spoke with greater freedom than we had yet met with.

"There are different kinds of kunu, and some are big and are very bad; but some are small and do not make much trouble," he began.

835 776 588 681 The greatest kunu came from making a child with a member of one's own family, with one's true, true sister or, what would be almost as bad, with a child of one's mother's sister. Murder was a great kunu, too, and perhaps next to that was the kunu that came to the Bush Negro if he informed to the white man against one of his own kind. Then there were the kunu that one got for false accusation, and for repeated stealing, and even for lying, if it were done too much. For lying is not good, lying makes too much trouble among people. And there were many more kinds of kunu, some of which he mentioned. Killing a snake or a tiger and not burying it with honor brought on a kunu, and cutting down a silk-cotton tree was kunu.

776 When a big kunu came into a family, it wiped it out. One by one the members of the family died. Men died, women died, and children were never born, or they died when they were small. "This goes on until the family is finished," Fa'aku said. A lesser kunu could kill as well, but its vengeance would be directed only against the women who carried on the line of succession to office and property, or

if it was smaller still it would plague the members of the family with sickness, or bad luck, or it might make them poor and send all kinds of trouble to them. 776

"Kunu," he went on, "attacks the family of the offender, but almost never the person who has done the evil thing himself. That would be too easy. If I wanted very much to do something I should not do, then I might be willing to take death in the end. But to punish my whole family until it is ended—that is too much."

"But what is kunu?" we asked.

"Kunu is a spirit. We dance to it and serve it with offerings. It is not the same in every village, but in our village we dance kunu in this way. If we dance it during the next moon, then we dance one day only, and two months later we dance kunu again. Then we wait eleven months and dance again. We do this every year in the same way." 776 782 796

"Is this enough to keep kunu away? Would it not be better to dance more often?"

"It would do no good at all to dance kunu more often. The spirits would only be angry if they were disturbed all the time. If you have kunu, you have it," we heard again.

But why, we asked, were not people careful? Why, if they knew that kunu was hard, did they not walk more softly still, so that they might avoid this trouble?

"Ma, kye! There are always things happening, people always do things they shouldn't."

"Then life is hard for you Saramacca people," we said. "You must always think of kunu."

Our seriousness amused him. It was, after all, this way with kunu. When you had it, you did what you could. If a wrong was done, then it had to be paid for. But the Bakra should not think that the Saramacca people weren't happy. There were good spirits, too. While some spirits punish, others protect. 776

"Have you seen our women dance, Bakra? A Saramacca woman's foot can do things, mati. Have you seen them dance bandamba? Have you seen them *chaka*—shake?" he said, laughing, and turning to the men about him, he added, "We will show them how our women dance—and our men!" 535

Chapter V

THE SHRINE TO THE RIVER GODS

I

000 ON THE narrow strip of land below the Mamadam, our hammocks were slung between trees whose trunks leaned well over the water, so that once we stretched out on the canvas, it was like swinging over an abyss to the rhythm of water wearing down rock.

133 At one time the shrine to the gods had stood on this
778 clearing, but boats had gone aground in the falls, and rafts which needed but little urging when the spirits were friendly were swung about in the current and lost to their kingdom at the river bottom. Even now a great log lay wedged in between rocks in the middle of the stream. The water had worn grooves into its hard surface, yet there it was, held fast against the timeless flaying of the falls.

821 Nor was that all. One year when the time for the new
782 rains came, the rain did not fall. In the villages the priests
789 climbed the ladders within the sacred enclosures and
776 from on high poured out libations to the ancestors, beseeching them to intercede in behalf of the living. Those who had river spirits went to the waterside when the moon was dead to dance to the gods. But the drums gave back a dull sound, and the dancing was listless. Those who plunged into the river to swim against the rapids while the drums intoned the exhortations did not remain under water long, and when they came up they uttered no oracles. Many who were known to be possessed by powerful spirits paced back

and forth on the sandy bank to the rhythm of the voicees in 821
the drums, but their gods would not come. They could not 782
dance, they could not find peace while the drums spoke, and 789
so this disconsolate pacing went on week after week, on 776
those days when the river gods might be danced to. Sometimes the pulse of the drumming, quickening for an interval, stirred the dancers. A shudder would go through the body of one or another and the dry throats would fall to uttering the sacred cries, but almost the next instant the hand of the drummer would go limp, and once more the listless, agonized pacing would continue. The gods were angered. When the drums called them from the river bottom, they came grudgingly and remained sullen, refusing to make their wishes known, and no gods or ancestors came to counsel the wise men in their sleep how to bend the will of the spirits of the river.

In the fields the parched earth baked in the merciless
heat until it was like whitened bone. The few plants that 731
had pushed their way up through the sandy soil were now 776
brown dust which any wind might scatter. But there was
no wind. No rain, no wind, for in the river the god of the
wind dwells, and in the sky the rain god, and these gods
are twins, and twins have but one soul, since it is with the [845]
gods as it is with humans.

No rain, no wind. Famine was upon the land.

At last, at the village of Opoku a woman had a dream. [787]
She was a pure albino, one of the type who, together with
those who show by the slight turn of red in their wooly [826]
hair a strain of albinism, are called Tonė people, and are
identified with the river gods. To this Toné woman the
gods came in sleep, and spoke their will.

"And what was it you gave to the gods?" we asked 776
Sedefo, who had fallen silent at this point in his story. 782

"Mati," he said, after a pause, "I am not an important 731
man. You ask what I may not tell. My mouth cannot
take upon itself to speak what concerns our big men." [829]

This much he would say. A boat filled with things had been sent down the river. Men standing at the river bank

776 had seen a hand reach out for the boat, had seen it vanish
782 out of sight. The gods had accepted the offerings. That year
731 the Granman from the city, the white Granman, had to
send rice from a far country to feed them, but the next
year the crops were good, and all had been well since that
time.

[778] "And was that when this shrine was removed to the
other island?"

"*M'an sabi. A kan de*—I do not know. It is possible."

2

782 "When you get to the Mamadam," we had been told by
778 a priestess in the city, "wash your face in the running
water, and call on the Mother of the River three times."

Another had said, "If your foot should trip anywhere, be
783 sure to call on your ancestors, but if you should happen to
778 slip at the Mamadam, you must go at once to the river,
strike the water three times, and ask the Mother of the
[774] River to release your soul. It is a bad thing to lose your
soul there."

And our principal story-teller in the city, who was some-
538 thing of a wit, had said: "You both have light eyes. Your
776 hair is not dark. You are not unlike the Bonkoru people
who are light, and who, up the river, you will hear called
the Toné folk." He was speaking of albinos. "It may be
that you have a river god without knowing it. When you
come to the Mamadam the spirit may come to you. You
may find yourself speaking the tongue that only the Toné
people know, and dancing the dances to the river gods, and
swimming up the rapids. It will be a fine sight to see you
dance to the drums. There was once such a woman. A
woman white as you are, you hear? I myself saw her dance.
[826] When she danced, she wore red, and put a plug through her
lip, and as she danced her color changed. She became black.
When the spirit was satisfied, it let her go, and she paled
and was a white woman again. I myself saw that woman
dance. I saw her grow black while she danced, and saw

her become pale again. This may happen to you when you get to the Mamadam." 538 776

As he spoke, he began to beat on the table the drum rhythm which calls the river god, and he sang, 776 533

"*Today, today, O Spirit,*
Hard times are upon us
Ingi-o.
Hard times are upon us. [539]
Today, today, Boyo,
Hard times are upon us
Ingi-e."

And then he sang another song, which he said had been sung at the time when black people were running away from slavery, and is still heard at dances to the spirits of the river, the *watra ingi*, as the river gods are called in the city. In it, he called on the agida, the great drum upon which, in town as in the bush, the Negroes call the river gods, and on *Kopsi*, the name of one of the spirits of the water. This time he sang,

"*I will play the agida today,*
I will knock the agida today-o
Kopsi will foil the magic
Of the crowing cock.
O, I will play the agida today, [539]
I will knock the agida, today-o,
Kopsi will foil the magic,
Of the crowing cock.
I will play the agida today."

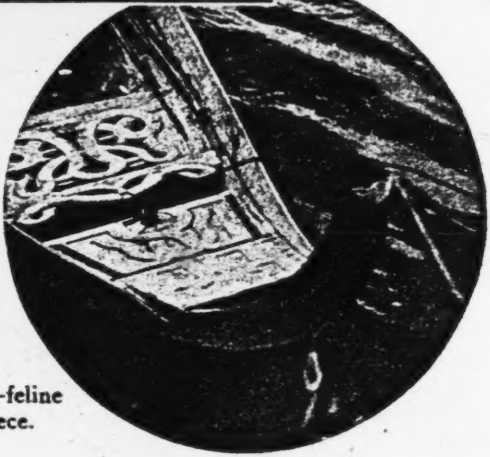
3

As we gained the island where the shrine itself stood and looked about us from the high rocks of the sacred spot, there lay before us in the early morning light a scene of inexpressible beauty. At dusk the narrow strips of land which forced the river into three channels had been like dark machetes plunged into the body of the great stream. 133 [778]

501
291

Just above the Mamadam.

501
532



Detail of boat—feline head on crosspiece.

[Facing P. 84]

(Facing page 84)

133 But now a soft haze floated over stream and bush. To the right was the Ingi Sopi channel, dropping so sheer that not even an unloaded dugout could make its way up the rapids, not a single log of wood could be floated down. To the left was the Mamadam, a smoother, more rounded slope. It was up these falls that our boats would later be hauled.

501 Below us on the rocks our men were unloading the 484 corials and carrying the provisions along the narrow trodden path to the topmost ledge of the falls, where the empty dugouts would be reloaded after they had been taken up through the streaming water.

133 Beyond lay the full stretch of the river. As far as the eye could see, there were none of the channels, none of the many islands which are met with everywhere on this river from its very headwaters to the reaches of the tidal belt near the coast. About us was a stillness which the very roar [136] of the water heightened. The parrots had long ago passed on in pairs. The butterflies would wait for the sun before they went winging from the east bank to the west. This was a moment of pure interlude. No sun, no breeze, no 000 sound, no glow. This was the moment before the fragmentary dawn would end, before the haze would lift, this the moment when night, having met day, as the Bush Negroes said, was disappearing from sight.

"It is fine here, ai!" Bayo called to us, as he walked on [482] with a large canister balanced on his head, making his way up the rocks with the sureness and ease of one who is strolling down a lane with the consciousness of a pleasant encounter at the next turning.

778 As soon as the mist had lifted, we walked up the rocks 346 to the shrine. Facing us and the lower river, a tall, slender pole, weathered to a pale silver, stood higher than the roof of the shrine in front of which it was planted. At its top were the crude outlines of a head and, some three feet from its base, two side pieces were nailed to it and grounded at an angle to steady the image against the onrush of a sudden wind. A short distance from the pole was the shrine

itself, an open shelter under a thatched roof resting on four 778 posts. Inside it, upon the ground, lay a flat stone whitened 346 with sacred clay, and on this a bottle stood. Directly behind the stone was the altar, a low table on which lay several egg-shaped pieces of the sacred pemba—the white clay—and some egg-shaped stones which had come from the bed of the river. A circle of iron, perhaps two fingers' breadth in thickness and having a diameter of ten or twelve inches, rested on the ground under the altar. A stick had been planted to face the thicket of wild pineapple that made a wall at the back, and from it hung a strip of white cotton for the ancestors. To the left of this was a simply carved [352] stool, the tracery of its design become all but indistinguishable under the coat of white clay which covered it. Several bottles lay at the foot of this stool.

"Ya-hai, mati, you are praying to the Mother of the River. It is well," said Kasanya, as he came up to us with his pole-man and the men from Gankwe and interrupted our scrutiny of the shrine.

Followed by Sedefo and Asikanu, he entered the shrine, 782 while the others stood with us outside the railing which connected at sides and back the posts upon which the roof rested. Kasanya called on the Sky God first. "*G'an gadu*," he began, "Mother of the River, Ancestors, grant that we travel safely. Grant that we bring the white man safely to the country of the Granman. Grant that the white man pay us well. I thank you."

As he finished, the listening men clapped their hands in unison, and spoke in chorus, "Great thanks!" Some distance away, down the slope which dropped to the river, was Bibifo, who wanted to be called Adrian. He did not come too near the shrine, but there he was, halfway up, with head bent, his lips moving as he muttered a prayer of his own.

Now Sedefo came forward, and Kasanya left the shrine 783 and disappeared behind the pineapple bushes. When he 824 came back he held leaves in his hand, which he said were sacred. He would crush them and put them in water dipped

783 824 here at the Mamadam, and later he would bathe with this that he might be purified. Meanwhile Sedefo and Asikanu, each in his turn, addressed the Mother of the River, each speaking his errand and asking that his journey be prospered.

782 Bayo came up alone when the loading was quite finished. He sat down on a crosspiece of the shrine to one side of the flat rock, poured some of the contents of the bottle on the stone, and, taking up one of the egg-shaped pieces of pemba, he rubbed it between his fingers and touched the [302] moist stone with his whitened hands. Now with his fingers he streaked his upper arm, just below the shoulders and over the muscles which played to the swinging of the pole-stick, and then his chest and knees.

"Mother of the River, give us a safe journey. Carry the white man and his woman without sickness. I thank you."

Later, when we were about to make off, he turned to us with his ready laugh. "You will walk well, Ba'ka. I have a strong spirit. I said things to the Mother of the River under my breath which you did not hear. The Mother of the River will look after you."

"What is this log, Bayo, right here on top of the falls? Why has no one claimed it?" we asked, pointing to the log of purple-heart close by, which we had noticed lying across the Mamadam.

"When it was sent down, something happened to turn it sidewise, and it was caught so. No one will touch it. It must be that the gods wanted it for themselves."

4

778 784 There are many shrines on the river. At the G'an Creek a man would speak his prayer from a distance, call the creek "ancestor," state his errand, and continue his journey. Far up the stream, where the juncture of the Pikien Rio and the Grand Rio forms the river which the Bush Negroes call the Saramacca, is the Tapa Wata shrine. There, our men said, we would do well to avoid looking, though our boat rested across the river more than a quarter of a mile

away. It seemed dangerous even to notice the strip of white 778
cotton which showed high above the falls, though the stick 784
from which it hung we could not see.

"Human beings do not go there," Bayo had said warningly. "Human eyes must also not go there."

But the shrine at the Mamadam is a friendly place. There 778
a man finds a moment's ease. For a brief interval, at least, 484
the voyager upstream or down rests there to get his breath, as he makes ready for a new start. Directly below the falls is a stretch of still water, which follows upon the wearisome portage at the Musumba Prati and the struggle with the rapids just above it, while, when continuing up river, the boatmen face a succession of rapids before another stretch of quiet water is reached. It is not strange, therefore, that no man, whatever his need to make time, will fail to stop at the Mamadam long enough to make known to the Mother of the River his errand and to ask for the continuance of her protection.

This shrine is the home of the Great Mother of the 778
inland waters, she who, above all else, had secured to the 776
ancestors of these Bush Negroes their freedom from slavery. In the city and on the plantations of the coastal region the Negroes, under states of possession by the water gods, sing of their longing to join those at the Mamadam.

[533]
[539]

Let me die on the river, O!
Let me die on the water, O!
All the Ingi spirits
Are at the Mamadam,
Let me die on the river, O!

Deep in the interior, if one of the elders, let us say a man of the Dahomey clan, is alarmed at the prospect of the white man penetrating their bush, some man can be looked to, then, to say reassuringly, "Have no fear. They will not come beyond the Mamadam!"

For this river is their own. "Once, long, long ago," the 173
legend was told us, "this river was but a creek. There were no great trees here, no rocks. There were no boats, no

173 clearings, no villages. Our ancestors came and made of this creek a great river. They cleared the forest and built villages. They brought their gods from Africa with them, and the gods made the trees grow, and the gods made the clayey banks so that our old women might make the black obia pots. Once, long, long ago, two boats came up, each carrying six men. These were our ancestors. It is they who made this bush. It is they who made the river from a small creek."

Here the legend ended. The glow in the speaker's eyes was gone, and the intent expression of the dark face. When we questioned further, it was as though we spoke to a wooden mask, brown, passive.

"And women?" we asked at last, hoping that the spirits might permit the speaker to tell us half of what he knew of his female ancestors. "Did no women come? How did your ancestors get women to bear for them sons and daughters to people the bush?"

"The women, Bak'a, God gave them!"

Chapter VI

THE PROVISION GROUND

I

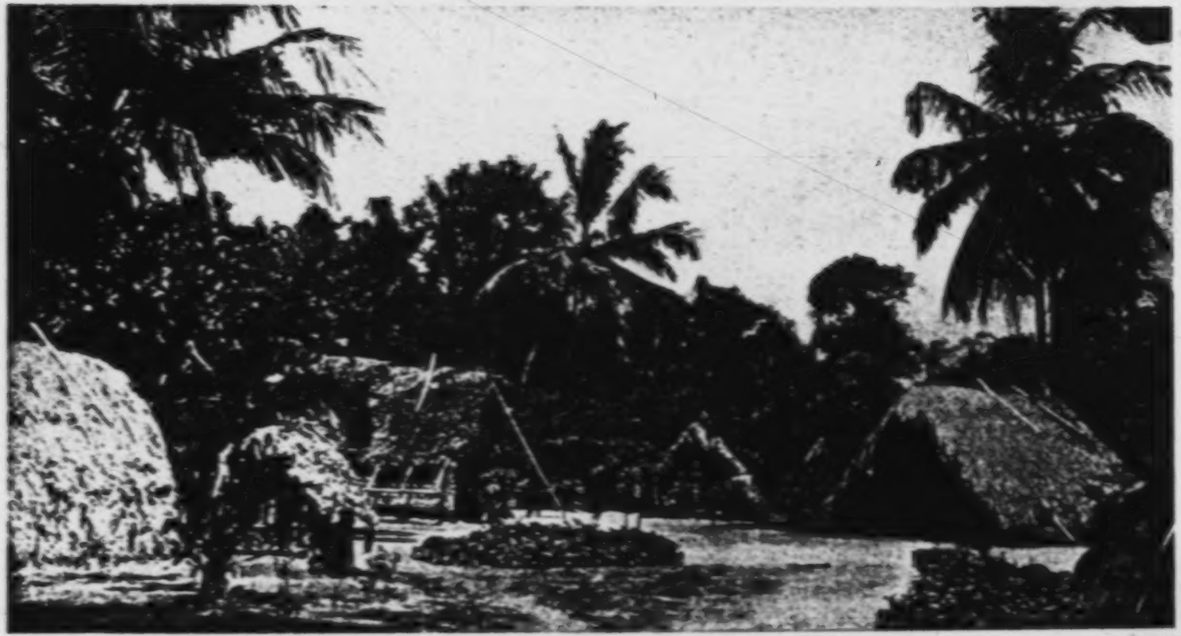
THE chameleon says: "Haste is all right, but caution 538
is also a good thing."

Bibifo spoke this proverb when we "went aside" with our men to see whether we would accept Chief Fandya's hospitality for that night and the next, that we might 574
see a dance in his village. The rapids above the Mamadam had been difficult, and beyond Baikutu were more rapids. A rest was welcome to Bibifo, and especially a rest at the village of Fandya, where the Granman himself stopped when on his way down the river.

"A man is well here with Fandya," Kasanya said. Though he was not of the same clan as the chief of Baikutu, Fandya's clan was an ally of the Granman, and Fandya himself a man of consequence on the river, not alone in its political life, but, what was more to Kasanya's taste, in matters relating to magic. "For the sake of good broth, [538]
you eat the sour dumplings," he said to us, indicating his acquiescence, yet hinting that the men would look for pay for the time they would be forced to remain idle in the village, if we stayed.

But the Gankwe men were for going on. Farther up the river were friendly villages from which several of them had drawn their wives, and farther still their own clan village. Asikanu, speaking for them, said, "Waiting for tomorrow is [538]
what caused the toad to remain without a tail. It is still early. The next village is not too far away."

[Facing p.90]



Baikutu, Chief Fandya's village.

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(Facing page 90)

11 Herskovits & Herskovits E-5 (1928-1929) 1934
SR8 Bush Negroes SR8
Saramacca

574 In his own house, Fandya continued to urge our staying.
609 "Ame'ika Fandya," he said—the year before he had given
his own name to the white man—"remain with us tonight
and tomorrow. I am an old man. I would like to know that
you saw a dance in my village. When you go to the Neng'e
country, I would like you to say that Captain Fandya knew
how to treat a stranger who came as a friend. Last year
when you were here you said you would come with your wife.
You have come. Your wife has come. Last year you came,
and since then all has gone well in our village. Today
there are not many people about. The women are
[462] away in the fields harvesting the rice; the men are in the
bush hauling lumber. But tomorrow night the women will
come in from the planting grounds, because the day after
they may not work in the fields, and tomorrow, too, the
men will come. Stay and see our dances."

And the bassia, the man second in command, said,
[789] "Mati, last year I took an obia against the evil eye from my
own door and gave it to you to hang over yours, that
enemies entering your house might not bring in with them
bad magic. All has gone well with you. Stay. The gods have
shown they favor our friendship."

2

361 The will of the Gankwe men had, however, prevailed,
and we reached the village of Pa'aba that day in good time.
It was one of the largest on the river. In front of the azang
501 which guarded the road new boats lay on their sides, and
farther up the path were others in the making, some black
inside with charring, others huge hollowed-out logs, like
gigantic drums, waiting for the hand that would set their
pulses beating. These boats were as large as any we had
seen on the river, as large as the boat Sedefo had rejected
because it rolled and he had to think of his kunu.

[556] Kasanya said, "This is a prosperous village. They make the best boats on the river here."

And Bayo said, "Ai, this village has strong men."

396 [292]

We watched Sedefo and his pole-man adjust their ceremonial top cloths, and, paddles in hand, start up the path, as we joined Kasanya and the other men who were examining the boats. Kasanya, an excellent woodworker himself, ran his hands over the sides of the dugouts much as though he were touching things which held life inside them.

"There is much work making a boat. One the size of this needs cunning. It isn't anybody can do it. First the bark is cut away. Then you outline a space here on top, and with your machete you cut away inside. When you have done this, it is only the beginning."

He led us to just such a log, and then to another on which burning had been done. "You can only burn very little at a time, and you must fire carefully, carefully. You make a small fire and char the wood—you make a fire, and quench it, make a fire and quench it. So it is done. Then you take wet leaves and put them into the boat, and on the leaves you place live coals so that the steam can soften the grain of the wood. When the wood is softened, it can be forced into shape. Sticks are wedged in to make the opening hold. Slowly the log begins to have the lines of a boat."

But all this we were made to see called for the most exacting patience as well as skill, for any misjudged pressure might split the wood.

"Many moons come up and die before a log is fashioned into a boat, and even then, there is still the carving to be done on stern and prow; the crosspieces to be put in, the sides built up. It is not a thing a child undertakes, Bak'a."

Now Bayo, who had listened attentively to Kasanya's explanation of how boats were made, found a pretext to bring us back to the water, and soon he took up the talk of boats.

501

"Boats are like people. See, this we call a head. At the other end are the buttocks. Here are the ribs, here inside the belly. The crosspieces are the knees. Feet? Ma' Neng'e! What would a boat want with feet?"

484 But Bayo's pleasant story came to an abrupt end. Down
574 toward the bank came Sedefo and his companion, motioning
the men to join him. They all gathered in front of the guard
of palm fronds, and began to discuss something in low
[776 voices, while from the village came the staccato rhythms
to the Sky God and to the Kromanti spirits in tones at first
782] soft, but swelling and quickening as they continued.

Sedefo came up to us at last and said, "I will tell you something, but you must not think the people of Pa'aba are unfriendly. I will tell you this. Let us go on and make camp farther up the river. There is a provision ground not too far away. We will make it in time."

789 In the boat Bayo told us that many were possessed in
574 the village, and since here at Pa'aba they danced Kromanti
strong, the men did not think it safe to bring us to the
village. The year before Kasanya had spent a trying night
here. Two or three of the men had found guns and had gone
tearing about the village, so that not alone had the women
shut themselves up in their huts, as they often did at
Kromanti dances, but the men, too, had had to go in hiding.

"That is why we are going on. But I have a strong Kromanti spirit myself. I will go back to Pa'aba tonight and watch the men dance," he said with a laugh.

3

574 It was already quite dark when we made the planting
[487] ground. Up a narrow footpath we followed Kasanya.

"*Koni, koni*—Take care, don't trip at night," he kept calling to us. "*Mbwogu*—Hurry," he urged, though we needed no urging to keep close behind him in this narrow dark shaft which cut the greater darkness of the bush in two.

Bibifo would sleep in our boat to watch the provisions, Kasanya explained as he led the way, for the clearing was so far from shore that it was not wise to leave the boats unwatched.

"It is far," he said. "Grounds are cleared that way—not too near a village, not too near the shore."

THE PROVISION GROUND

It is told that this practice of isolating the provision 251
ground was a heritage of the days when the ancestors were escaping from slavery, for then the whites were at war with them, and villages had often to be deserted. But to desert a village was one thing. What local spirits were there could be urged by the proper magical invocations to follow to another site. Men did not, after all, derive their food supply from a village. It was the provision ground upon which life depended. The provision ground had at all costs to be saved. Access to it was, therefore, made difficult. [487]
Trails were never clearly marked, and were often marked to mislead the invading enemy. The river bank was allowed to give no hint of shielding, behind the thicket, a clearing where crops grew to feed the warriors and their families. When a village was destroyed by the enemy, the Bush Negroes fell back on their fields and maintained life. To this day, it is said, this practice holds, for though hostilities ended more than a hundred years ago, the planting grounds are rarely found close to a village.

Walking behind Kasanya in the darkness which gave to 361
each down-hanging vine the outlines of the great aboma [825]
snake, held sacred in this bush, we fell to wondering whether in this, as in so many instances, the accounting for current beliefs, in terms of the experience of slavery alone, would prove inadequate.

"We have arrived, Bak'a," said Kasanya, interrupting our speculations. His eyes were sharper than ours, for not even when he spoke did we see the widening of the path and the clearing beyond. Yet fewer than a hundred additional paces found us facing four small huts scattered about a sandy open place, and a woman who was on her way from one house to another turned toward us. She listened to what Kasanya said, with her head slightly averted, pulling at her pipe all the while.

"Ai, they can stay," she said, pointing to the largest of the four houses. "As many of you as can, sleep there. The house next to it is for provisions. We have not much to offer here."

REBEL DESTINY

574 In the doorway of one of the huts, a woman squatted
609 over a fire, and at her feet a child sat busying itself with
pushing the firewood toward the center. Our cook had
planted two forked sticks in the ground, and on them had
hung our lanterns, so that we could see the woman silhouetted
against the fire and the naked child on the ground
singing the seketi which Bayo had sung for us so many
[533] times on the river. Over and over the child tried the air, her
mother humming it for her softly, while from the doorway of
another house a man sat watching them. We had not
noticed him until the lanterns had come. The planting
[291] ground at harvest time is not a place a man frequents. He
was a strange figure there on his low stool, as he sat wrapped
to his neck in a large striped cloth. He made not the slightest
move, uttered not a single word. But for his cough, he
might have been a corpse propped up in the doorway. We
stood hesitating whether to cross the short distance between
us and the fire to greet the woman and the man, but before
we could come close enough to them to speak, we heard
Bayo calling us in a voice we had never heard him use in a
strange village.

"Bak'a, Bak'a. Come. They want you inside." When we
were out of earshot of the woman at the fire, he said in a
whisper, "Do not go over to those houses. Tomorrow when
we are away from here, I will tell you why. It is for that I
called you."

We had no need, however, to puzzle over Bayo's warning.
[164] Our cook, who had heard the conversation of the men, told
us that the man in the doorway was a leper.

753 "You know how it happens, Massa? Among us townspeople
it is this way. A child inherits a *trefu* from his father.
262 It is one thing, or many things, he must not eat. If he eats
what he should not, then he sickens. We know a person
who has eaten his trefu by the spots that come out on his
skin. If a man goes on eating the things which are his trefu,
then the spots become worse and worse. He becomes a leper.
So that's how it is."

He did not at once answer the questions we put to him.

"I'll tell you how it is mostly," he went on, after a 753
silence. "Sometimes a woman will lie about the father of 262
her child. The child will grow up keeping the trefu of a strange man. But it won't be his real trefu. His mother, you see, lied about his father. In the end, if nothing is done, this child will be sick, and later he will become a leper. Only a bad woman will lie about her child's father, because only a bad woman will want to hurt her own child. It doesn't happen among the girls who wear kerchiefs and live the way the old people live. These girls dance to the spirits. They are afraid of the ancestors. They are afraid [774]
of their *akra*—their soul—and the Earth Mother. But those [776]
girls who wear hats—ai, Massa, those girls do anything!" [829]

But here in the bush, it seemed, they had other beliefs about leprosy, he went on. Here they believed it was a kind 753
of a spirit, too. When a leper died he was not given a good [774]
burial. No wakes were held for him. He was given no coffin.
He was buried in the Bad Bush, where the sorcerers were 766
thrown. 775

"When a leper dies, they don't want him to come back again. They don't treat his spirit well. They do the same with him as with a madman. They bury him with no more ceremony than a child, who came on earth, and would not stay. They say it's all because of a bad spirit, and they don't want bad spirits on earth."

4

241
"Why do we plant away from the village?" 361

It was the old woman talking, as we sat and smoked with
her. The moon had come up above the maripa palm trees [137]
behind the house where the leper had been helped into his hammock, and it was pleasant out-of-doors.

"Why, you ask? Well, sometimes when the bush is burned, a wind comes up suddenly, and sends the flames, down, down, beyond the cleared ground. How would it be with a village, if we cleared our grounds too close to it, and this happened? No, Bak'a, we people of the bush know better. . . . What do you say? Why do we do our clearing

241 away from the river? When the big rains come, the river
361 goes up more and more. If our crops were too close to the
water, then in the big rains the land would be flooded,
and the crops long under water. . . . Yes, and we have to
[136] think of the ants, too. Ants, once they find their way into a
field, will destroy everything. They like especially the
[137] green leaves of the young cassava plants. When the young
leaves go, there is no cassava. So we move farther and
farther away for our fields. Two, three years, and new fields
must be cut, so that the yield might feed us all."

311 Once a field had been deserted, say, for five years, why
241 did they not reclaim it later? we enquired, for by that time
the big bush would have made fertile again the soil that
had been exhausted.

"In this bush we do it like that. Why, I don't know. Our ancestors found much land for us. When we want new fields, we cut farther and farther into the bush."

5

As Bayo and Angita set off for the dance at Pa'aba,
[521] Kasanya and Sedefo joined us, and we talked of crops and
planting, of woman's work and man's, of good harvests
and bad, and this is what was told us.

[462] Finding a new field and clearing it is a man's task. If a
man is about to be married, or if the field a man's wife works
has become exhausted, then he goes into the forest, near
to the planting ground of his mother and to the fields of
311 his family, and casts about for a place to clear. A field
241 must not be in a hollow, or the crops will not grow, and
776 rice needs the sun of a hill slope to thrive. Once having
found a spot where the drainage is good, he looks about to
see if the spirits will allow its use. Patiently, painstakingly,
he goes from one clump of matted vines to the next, machete
in hand, searching for signs of an ant hill, or an Akatasi
tree that is sacred to the gods of the ant hill, or for snakes,
or a natural clearing belonging to the Apuku gods of the
bush. No silk-cotton tree must be there, no loko tree
wherein dwells the god of the same name so near that it

might catch fire were a wind to come up when the under- 311
brush is burned. If he spies a slender bent liana from which 241
the Kromanti "Congo-bush" sticks are made, then he has 776
to be sure to cut it down with the proper invocation, so that the spirit inside the liana will not bend him to its own shape.

Kasanya continued his explanation. "When a field is 241
found, it is the man who clears it." A man calls on his 476
relatives or friends to help him. The men come with their [462]
machetes, and they cut away at bushes and shrubs, they cut away the lianas which are twined about the trees, and then the trees themselves. Then they go away, leaving what they have cut to dry. "To take all this away would be too hard, and, besides, fire does the work better, and fertilizes the ground as well."

So, when the wood is dry, they come with fire, and let the fire finish the work. Then the ashes are allowed to lie for a time, for, though this clearing is done during the dry season, occasional showers can be relied upon to work the ash into the ground. Then, too, the time for planting is not yet.

"Many things we plant a little before the old year meets the new," the old woman said.

"When it is time to break the ground," Kasanya went 462
on, "the man and the woman work together. It is then that 241
the woman begins her work in this field. What was done before had to do with cutting timber, and our proverb says: Woodworking is not a woman's affair."

The man alone clears the ground, but the woman helps him break the earth.

"Breaking the ground is not easy," the old woman again interrupted. The matted roots have to be dug up with an
iron hoe, for the Bush Negro works as his ancestors did [412]
hundreds of years ago in Africa. He has no plough, no beast of burden to help him in the fields.

When all this is done, then it is time to see to the conse- 241
cration of the earth to its fertile uses. Rituals vary with each clan, and often from village to village of the same clan.

REBEL DESTINY

782 Among the people of one group, the principal ceremony
241 may be held in the clearing itself. The drums are brought,
535 and men and women and children pray for fertility. The
beautifully carved apinti drum sounds the invocation to the
Great God and to the ancestors, while the tall agida drums
are brought to call the earth spirits. Two by two the men
dance susa, the dance which in pantomime reproduces an
ancient warrior's combat with spear and shield, the winner
taking on a new combatant, until the final winner is given
a wand as a reward, and gains for himself the title of
"G'aman of Susa" until the next dance is held. Other
dances follow. Perhaps the women now li[illegible]n two long
[585] rows facing each other, and dance banc[illegible], the dance
[845] which celebrates marriage and the birth of twins, and the
birth of a child who is born feet foremost. The motions are
the slow rhythmic manipulations of the muscles of hips and
[842] abdomen. It is a dance of fertility, danced by the very
young girls as well as by those who have borne children.
But the women who are past the age for dancing sit with
[888] their men, arms interlaced, swaying to the rhythms of the
songs they sing. . . . There are offerings to the earth
spirits, poured upon the earth out of black obia pots and
[769] calabashes, while other offerings are set upon the ground for
the ancestors.

In another settlement, the ritual would be chiefly carried
on in the village itself, and there might be a local dance of
[842] fertility, danced nowhere else on the river. "An old, old
ancestress taught it to us," the villagers would say.

462 When it is time to plant, the woman plants with the
241 man's help.

"When I plant a new field," said the younger woman, "I
782 pray as I work."

539 And this is her prayer:

O Sky God, Mother of the Earth, Ancestors,
I am planting a field,
Make it bear;
People who come to me must eat,

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O spirits, you must help me. 241
Help me find food, 782
That I may give to those who come; 539
Help me find food,
That all those who come to me may eat.
I am planting pinda,
Make it come;
I am planting yams,
My yams must grow;
I am planting cassava,
Make my cassava yield;
I am planting rice,
Make it come;
Let the earth copulate well,
Let me, too, be fruitful;
Let me live by my work;
My children have gone down the river,
They have gone to the white man's country,
Let them live and be fruitful;
When they return to me,
Let them bring back possessions;
O spirits, I myself must live,
I have belongings,
Let my belongings live;
Mother of the Earth,
This new field which was found
Make it yield food for me,
Make it yield for those who come;
I have planted seed,
The seed must bear.
O Great God, Earth spirits, Ancestors,
I thank you.

6

After the planting, the life of the women is spent at the 462
provision grounds for the greater portion of the year, for 241
the crops must be carefully tended. The jungle is not hospitable to those who invade it, and it is only at the

462 price of grueling effort that a living can be wrested from its
241 jealous grasp. The women in their fields care for the growing
crops, hoeing the ground so that moisture and sun reach the young plants, seeing that the lianas which throw their creepers over the cleared spaces to throttle the tender shoots do not get headway, and, as each crop ripens, attending to its harvesting.

262 Yams, cassava, and nappi are roots. For their planting
243 some of the crop of the year before is preserved and cut up.
244 But rice and peanuts, or pinda, as these are called here in
the bush, and maize, of which the Bush Negroes learned from the Indians, and okra grow from seeds. The rice is planted on a hillside, for the Bush Negro does not grow irrigated rice, but the dry African variety that thrives on the slopes. Cassava, okra, peppers, plantains, peanuts, beans, sugar cane—each crop is allotted its own space, until the newly cleared ground is filled. A woman usually has two fields cut for her; one is called a rice field and one a cassava field. In each, the crops which yield several harvests a year are rotated. The cassava roots take nine months at least to ripen, but it is better to leave them in the ground ten or eleven months.

"It is the time of the great harvest now," the old woman said.

243 These were busy days for the women. With their short-
244 handled knives, they cut the rice stalk by stalk and made
small sheaves of the golden grain, raked over the dirt so that the peanuts might be found and gathered, chopped the ripe sugar cane with the machetes which they handled with the same sureness as did their men, and dug out the cassava roots so that they might be carried to the village
[262] and made into flour for the cassava bread which was the
staple of their diet.

"The corn," she said, "is not harvested now. We cut it at a different time; and the melons ripen later, too." At other times of the year there were other harvests, but this one, of the months of July and August, was the principal one.

THE PROVISION GROUND

It is the woman's task, then, to see to the food which the 462
Earth Mother yields, while the men are busy hauling lumber and making boats, hunting and fishing, and carrying the white man's loads to the city. In the leisure of the rainy season, while the women cut up the trade cotton cloth [294]
into long, narrow strips and sew them into cloths of traditional design, the men are at work carving fine things out of wood.

When the big rains come a man might busy himself carv- 462
ing doorposts for his new house, or he might make a paddle 322
to put away in his personal treasure house, so that, when he is ready to take a second wife, he might have the proper [584]
gifts to make her. Another might be making a small canoe paddle for his first daughter. She is four, perhaps, and already is of help to her mother in the field, carrying water [857]
from the river in a small Indian jar. Soon she will be strong enough to have the cutting of the kamemba begin—a few slashes about the navel at first . . . He will cover the surface of the paddle with beautiful traceries, each design a [532]
meaningful symbol, and to add to its beauty he will darken it with a mixture of oil and charred rice hulls. When it is finished it will be of a reddish-brown color, slender, and smooth to the touch of his fingers as the skin of his woman-child. Combs, food stirrers, trays, stools, peanut pounding boards, and, if a man likes, mortar and pestle—all these are carved when the rains are heavy and there is no work to be done on the river or in the bush.

So the work is divided. A man does a man's work—wood, 462
iron, hunting the game animals of the bush, and catching fish in traps, making baskets of wood fiber—all that is a man's affair he does. And the woman, tending the fields and cooking for her family, pounding palm nuts in her mortar to make palm oil, grating the bitter cassava to make [252]
flour free from the poison that is in the roots, caring for her house and carving calabash dishes with the symbols of men and women and fertility—woman does what it is woman's lot to do.

Chapter VII

BA ANANSI

I

538 WHETHER it was that our men were thinking of the Kromanti dance at Pa'aba, or whether something in the night itself stirred them, no one thought of going to his hammock. We sat silent for a long time, until our cook suddenly exclaimed, "You know what, Massa, this is a night for stories. Let me make something to drink, and it will be like a wake. We will have a good time."

But Sedefo, who sat nearest to us, was unresponsive. With Bayo and Angita off to the village where obia ruled the dancing, and Bibifo asleep in our boat, there were not enough people about for the proper telling of stories. He was fastidious about such matters, for he was a story-teller of no small reputation on the river.

Yet it was, without doubt, a night for stories, and our town man joined our cook and ourselves in persuading Sedefo to tell the tales which in town and bush recount the exploits of Anansi, the spider. This trickster Anansi in some African mythologies is the creator of the world and, here in Suriname, gives his name to all tales. We were, our boys informed Sedefo, something of story-tellers ourselves, and we had, moreover, learned how to introduce the interludes of song which break up the telling of a tale, and many of the songs as well.

"They know Anansi stories, Sedefo. . . . They can tell many of those we tell in town, and they know those they tell in the Negro country."

But Sedefo was still not impressed. 538

"We bush people have our own ways. How will it be with a long story, if the proper songs are not sung?"

So the discussion went on between Sedefo and the town boys, until among them they had gone over all the many details of how stories must be told. There was the interchange between the teller and his audience at the very beginning. Openings might differ. Here in the bush, one way was for the teller to cry "Mato!" and someone in his audience to call back "Tongoni!" What did this mean? It was a way to begin. That is how it was done long ago in the land of the Negroes. Did we not know that? Or the teller might begin with "Hireti!" and then the answer would be "Daieti!" But often, as well, the opening might be "Kri! Kra!" Sometimes, though now it was most often a way of beginning stories for children, the tale would be started with "Er tin tin," and the answer to this "Tin tin tin," in the manner of "Once upon a time."

What really mattered, however, was the way in which the intervals in the story-telling were dramatized. After the speaker had started his tale and had carried it to some incident where he paused for a moment, he would be interrupted by a call from someone in his audience, "Kri, kra!" His answer would come promptly, "What have you to say?"

"I myself was there," would be the response, and this would draw its question.

"What did you see?"

At this point, the person who had interrupted would 538
begin a song, and its chorus would be taken up by all who 533
were listening. And when it was ended, the leader of the
song would shout, "Go on with your story, my man!"

Now the telling would be resumed, but only for two or three minutes, when again a voice would call out, "Bato! I was there, too!" And without further colloquy another song would begin. This was the way stories should be told, and when people knew what they were about, then they might change the words of old songs and make up new ones

538 to fit the story that was being recited, or they knew the
533 songs that, as long as anyone could remember, had been sung at given intervals in a particular tale, and which themselves carried the action forward.

538 But Sedefo and our boys spoke not only of how a tale is opened and carried forward, but of the many ways of bringing a story to a close. A song might furnish a proper ending, or a proverb. "The reward for goodness is the cudgel," they agreed, might well end some of the stories about Anansi's exploits, or, "When you wish to eat with the devil, you must have a long fork." Or, "He who doesn't believe a lie, won't believe the truth," would sometimes be fitting, and "All showing of teeth isn't a grin." There was also the ending in which the teller vouched for his participation in the concluding events of his tale, as when he would say, "Bato! I myself sat with the King at his feast!"

But now our cook, whose patience was tried by this discussion, began to riddle.

"Mato!"

"Tongoni!"

"You have three things in your house," he started, looking about him at Sedefo and us, and at Kasanya, who had fallen asleep, and Asikanu, who sat in the doorway watching the younger woman. "One of them longs for daybreak. One of them longs for night. One of them longs for the world to come to an end. *Suma sa puru?*—Who will pull the riddle?"

Asikanu finally broke the silence.

"The first is a bed. It longs for daylight. The second is a stool. It is tired. It longs for night to come that it may rest. The third is a clock. It is weary of life. It wishes the world would come to an end."

And so a beginning was made. Sedefo turned to the cook.

"Friend," he said, "You tell a story. And then I will tell one for the Bak'a."

Our cook began: "Kri! Kra! All men in their places!"

Back came the answer, "Will it go?"

BA ANANSI

"It will go! . . . Anansi and Dew were great friends. The two worked together, each helping the other. So they lived. 539

"Well, now, they each planted a field of corn. But the corn belonging to Dew was finer than Anansi's, and Anansi was envious. He wished that he had the field which belonged to Dew. So he said to Dew, he said: 'Your corn is fine, but mine is finer. If mine were like yours, I should cut it, so that it might come up better.'

"But Anansi was lying. When you cut corn, it will not grow again. He was deceiving Dew."

Now came the voice of our town man, as he offered the first "cut" to the story: "Bato! I was there!"

"What have you to say?"

With this came the song. The one that he chose was in the Kromanti language, and later he told us it was a komfo song, one which taking its name from the African Ashanti word for priest, calls on the Ashanti earth spirits to bring the singer a magic wand which, when touching his head, will make him possessed by the earth gods. And as leader, he began: 539 535

Asanti boyo
Da mi widya
Akolo!

The others responded in chorus

Akolo, Akolo, Abanu ba.

Singer and chorus repeated verse and refrain, until our boy shouted, "Go on with your story, man!"

"And so, my friends, Dew cut his corn.

"But in the afternoon, when people passed, they saw that the corn had been cut. And they asked one another: 'What made Dew cut his corn? It was such fine corn.' Dew said it was Anansi who had made him do it. Then the people told him it would not grow again.

"And Dew said to them, he said, 'Well, all right. He tricked me with corn, but I am going to trick him with his mother.'"

Now came another interruption: "Bato! I was there!" and this time the song that cut the story was one of the spirit Sofia Bada. He is strong, and to dance for him is "heavy," a priestess of the city had told us. The words that were sung were a challenge sung by this warrior spirit of Allada, one of the ancient West African kingdoms.

Come try me
I am the man.
Come feel me,
I am the man
I am Sofia Bada
The strong man in Allada
Come try me,
I am a man.

"Let the story go on," said the singer.

"The story will go on. . . . So Dew worked hard until he had enough to buy himself a scythe, a hoe, an axe, and all manner of implements and clothes. And then he worked some more until he had put by some money.

"Then he went to his mother, and he said, 'Well, mother, I am going to do this. I am going to say that you are dead. You must hide upstairs, and I will set to work to make a coffin and to arrange for the burial.'

"And he did that. He sent word to all the animals that his mother died. And all the animals came together for the burial, and with them came Anansi.

"Now, Dew had it all arranged. He hid his mother underneath the plank on which the coffin rested, and placed beside her all the things that he had bought. He knew how greedy Anansi was.

"And so, before they were ready to take up the coffin, he began to wail, 'Ai, mother, see how you leave me. Not even an axe have you left for your son. Your son has not a single tool.'

539 "I go into the bush to hunt. I step on the green leaves, and there is silence. I step on the dry leaves, and there is a crackling sound. . . . I have pulled the riddle."

We turned to Sedefo, as Kasanya finished speaking.

"Now, Bak'a, I will tell you a story," he said. "It is about a man, a hunter, who saved three beings, a human, a snake, and a rat. Who would you say showed his gratitude in the end? The human being? Well, you will hear. It is late, and Kasanya is almost asleep. I will tell it to you without cutting. Listen to the story. You will like it."

And this was the story:

Hireti!
Daieti!
Listen well!

There was a man who went to the bush to hunt. He walked and walked, and walked so far until . . . he heard someone calling for help from inside a great pit. So he looked in the pit, and saw Human Being, Snake, and Rat.

Now, he said to himself, he said, "Snake is a bad animal. Rat is bad, too. I will help Human Being."

But after a while, as he thought it over, he said, "I will help all three, Snake, Rat, and Human Being who is like myself."

So Snake took his path, and Rat went on his way, and the Hunter took Human Being to his own house. But no thanks did he get from these three, whom he had saved from death itself.

Now Rat began to study what to do to help the man who had done him so great a favor. So he went to the King's treasure house and gnawed through a plank, and he stole much money. He brought it to Hunter as payment for having saved him from death.

So Hunter became a rich man. He bought new boats, and new axes. He bought beads and bracelets for his women, and cloths for himself. He built himself a new house and he found for himself another wife. He bought so many new things. . . .

"As he said this, all the things began to come out from under the plank. Anansi picked them up, and wished his own mother would die at once so that he might have these, too. Dew went on crying. He now begged his mother for some money. His mother flung the money at him. And so the burial went off well, and the mourners went their way. 539 533

"But now, day after day, Anansi and his mother quarreled. Anansi said, 'Why cannot death come to you as it did to Dew's mother?' Then one day he and his mother quarreled again, and in his anger he took up a stick and struck her, killing her."

Again there was the voice: "Bato! I myself was there!"

And the song was taken up:

A fine man is Amusi
A fine man.
If you believe in God
You must believe in Amusi.

"Anansi now did just as Dew had done. He fixed the plank properly, and began to weep just as Dew had wept, but nothing at all came of it. So they buried his mother.

"A week later, Dew had his mother come to the field, and when Anansi saw Dew's mother, he said: 'Friend Dew, isn't that your mother I see there?'

"He said, 'Yes, it is my mother. You deceived me about my corn. Now I have tricked you with your mother.'

"And so Dew's mother was alive, but Anansi's mother was dead. It is ended."

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Now Asikanu spoke. "Mato!" 539

"Tongoni!"

"I go into the bush to hunt. I greet the living, but they do not answer me. I greet the dead, and they speak."

This time Kasanya, who had sat dozing on his stool, heard and knew the answer.

But now, the Human Being he had saved was still living with him, and he saw what was happening. So he went to the Granman, and he told on Hunter. The Granman sent word to all the elders of the kingdom to come together for a *lanti krutu*—a court assemblage; a man was to be judged. And Hunter was thrown into prison.

As the news spread from village to village, Snake came to hear of it. He studied what to do to help Hunter who had saved him from death. Now, the King of that country had a beautiful daughter. Snake said to himself, he said, "If I bite the King's daughter, and then show Hunter a medicine to save the Princess from death, they will free him."

So Snake went to the house of the King, and bit the King's daughter. Then he hurried back to the bush, and broke off some leaves. The leaves were medicine for saving the Princess from the hands of Death. So he carried them to the Hunter in prison, and showed him how to make the medicine for curing the Princess.

Meanwhile, the King called on all the doctors in the village to come to his house and cure his daughter, the Princess. But not one of them could produce a medicine to help her. So the King sent messengers to every part of his kingdom to say that whoever knew of a medicine to cure his daughter would get half of his kingdom, and would marry the Princess.

Now the Hunter sent a message to the King that if he could leave the prison, and go to the King's house, he would cure the Princess. The King said to the messenger, he said, "All right. Bring him here." When Hunter came, the King said to him, he said, "All these clever doctors tried and tried and could do nothing, and you think you can cure my daughter!"

The Hunter said to the King, he said, "Ya-hai, my King. I am the very man who can cure her."

All the people of the village came to the King's house to see the man who said he could cure the King's daughter. So Hunter took the weeds he had been given by Snake, and crushed them well, and made his medicine. And this

539 medicine he rubbed into the wound which Snake had made when he bit the Princess. In an hour the Princess was better, and soon she was well.

The King was very happy. He caught Human Being who had betrayed Hunter, and put him into the same prison where Hunter had been. But Hunter, who made the medicine, married the King's daughter, and became King of the land.

"It is ended," concluded Sedefo, "and I myself was there, and my daughter danced bandamba at the wedding!"

3

When Sedefo finished, it was almost midnight. Kasanya and Asikanu had sometime before gone to their hammocks. And now Sedefo, too, rose to go.

"*D'u mundu,*" he said, as he went out. "Sleep well, all."

"*Ai-yo, so s'yepi-o!*—Yes, and do you sleep well, too!" Our boys sang back their response.

Since both they and we were still wide awake, they each offered to tell a short tale. But they told many stories, for there was a quality in the deep bush that night that allowed neither them nor us, unaccustomed to the jungle as we all were, to rest.

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We no longer recall the exact tales they told. But later we had opportunities to record many more than just the ones they told there in the provision ground. Many were long, longer than we can give here. Many were the same as those we heard told by the Bush Negroes but which, told at night at festivals for the dead, with all the element of dramatization that went with the telling, we could not record in our notebooks. We group some of those which, for us, hold something of the quintessence of the mind of the Suriname Negroes.

Anansi Becomes a Preacher

539 Anansi asked the King to permit him to become a preacher. The King said, let him go to church one Sunday

1: Herskovits & Herskovits E-5 (1928-1929) 1934

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and preach a sermon. The first Sunday Anansi preached, the King could not come to hear him. But the King gave him a black suit, and said he was to wear it the following week when he preached. 539

Now Anansi and Cockroach lived side by side. Beside the fence separating Anansi's yard from that of Cockroach stood a coconut tree. The tree grew in Cockroach's yard. It was not a large tree, but it did have a bunch of nice coconuts on it. The coconuts hung right above the fence of which one side belonged to Anansi, and the other side to Cockroach.

One day Anansi took his machete and cut the bunch of coconuts exactly in two. When Cockroach saw this, he said to Anansi, he said, "Why did you cut down the coconuts? The tree is in my yard. You had no right to cut them." Anansi said, "Yes, but didn't you see how they were hanging? how one-half hung on your side, and one-half on mine?" Cockroach said, "All right. I'll get even."

On the Saturday before Anansi was to preach his sermon in church before the King, he told his wife to air his black suit. His wife took the suit and hung it over the fence. So now Cockroach took his machete and cut off that part of the suit which was on his side.

In the morning the King went to church to hear Anansi preach. But Anansi could not come, because he had no suit to wear. The King was angry. He had Anansi put in jail. Anansi said to Cockroach, he said, "You there, as long as I live I will never forget this. As long as I live I will remember what you have done. You made me lose my job."

How Death Came to the City

Death had not yet come to the cities. He lived in the deep bush. But one day Anansi had no food. It was a time of famine. He took his hunting bag and his gun and went to hunt. He worked his way deep into the bush, and then walked all through it, but not one animal did he meet. So he walked on and on, until one day he came to Death's village. Death was sitting in his doorway.

539 Anansi was respectful. He said, "Howdo, Father Death." And he said, "Hunger is killing me. I have combed the entire bush for an animal, but not one did I find to kill."

Death said, "Come inside. I will give you some food." Death took him into the cook-house where much meat was being barbecued. When Anansi saw all this meat, his mouth began to water. Death gave him a fine portion of meat, and he ate until he had had enough.

Anansi said, "Many thanks." And he said, "But who are you who have so much meat to barbecue?"

Death said to him, "Do you not know that I am Death?"

Anansi said, "I see, Father Death, and that is why you have so much meat, and I walked through the entire bush and could find nothing." Then he said, "I am going to ask you a favor. I myself have eaten, but my wife and children have had nothing to eat. Give me some of this meat that I may bring them food."

Death said, "All right. Take that piece over there."

When Anansi came home, he said, "Sa Akuba, I found a place to get food. I do not have to bother looking around for something to eat, because when we have no food, I can go there and take it. Or better still, I can go and steal."

So whenever Anansi had no food, he went to the man Death's village, and stole Death's meat.

Death came home one day and noticed that some of his meat was missing, but he did not know who was at fault, until finally he lay in wait for the thief. Just as he hid in a corner, Anansi came. Anansi filled a basket with meat.

Death said, "Heh! So it is you who are the thief! Why did you do this?" But Anansi had no time to answer properly, for he set out on a run. Death ran after him. Death ran, and Anansi himself ran, too.

But when they came to the city, Anansi turned and saw Death at his heels. Anansi began to call in a loud voice, "Living-people all, shut your houses! Death is come!"

So, you see, Death came to the city, and many people have died because of the thief Anansi. If Anansi had not stolen Death's meat, Death would have remained quietly in the deep bush. 539

The Devil Has a Bad Name

Now the Devil said to a man one day, "No matter what good I do, I get a bad name for it." The man would not believe him. The Devil said, "Very well, I will show you." 539 776

So the Devil went to God, and he said to God, he said, "You put a stone on the path along which men travel, and I will put a bag of money there. Then we will see what happens."

Well, they did this. God put down the stone, and the Devil the bag of money. One day a man came down the path and stubbed his foot against the stone. Instantly he cried, "Ah, the Devil put the stone there that I might hurt my foot!" Later another man came along and saw the money. He took up the bag and called out, "God be praised! I thank you, Master, for letting me find this money!"

The Devil said, "You see how it is? I put the gold there, but it is God who receives thanks, while I am cursed for the stone God put on the road. It is as I said. The Devil cannot look for fairness in this world."

The Tar Baby

The King had a plantation where there were many fruits, and plantains, and other kinds of food. But someone was stealing the fruit and the crops. So the King had them put a large tar-baby in the field. 539

Now the thief used to come at night, and this thief was Ba Anansi. When he saw the image he became alarmed, and approached it with flattering words. Timidly he said to it, he said, "Father, how are you?" But he did not get an answer.

So he said, "If you do not speak to me, I will slap you!"

The image did not speak. Anansi struck him a blow, but his hand stuck. He said, "If you do not let me go, I will give you one with my other hand," and Anansi struck again. That hand stuck, too.

He said, "If you do not let me go, I will butt you." But when he butted him, his head stuck. So he said, "If you do not let me go, I will kick you." And then he kicked him.

But Anansi could do nothing more, for his head, his hands, and his feet were fast. So he had to remain there until they came and found him. And when they let it be known that Anansi was the thief, the King said that Anansi was to be killed.

The day Anansi was to die, he sent for his children and said to them, he said, "Children, you see I am about to die. What can you do to save me?"

Now each one of his children proposed some foolish thing, until the youngest one spoke. He said, "Father, you know what I am going to do? I am going to climb a tall tree and hide there. Then, when they come to put you to death, I will sing,

"*They kill Anansi till . . .*
They kill the Spider till . . .
The whole country will be flooded,
All the people will die,
The King's wife will die,
The King's daughter will die,
The King himself will perish,
Anansi alone will remain."

Now, when the King heard the voice singing, he asked, "What is that?"

Anansi answered, "Tye! Hearken, my King. God himself pleads for me!"

The King said, "It is not true. A thief must be punished."

But Anansi replied, "Tye! You will hear, my King, that it is the truth, because God will again speak for me." And soon the voice was again heard singing,

"*They kill Anansi till . . .*
They kill the Spider till . . .

The whole country will be flooded,
All the people will die,
The King himself will perish,
Anansi alone will remain."

Then the King became disturbed. He was afraid. . . . And so he came to free Anansi.

Why Chicken and Butter Are Always Found Together

Chicken and Butter were great friends. They lived together. Every morning early they went for a walk. Now, Chicken was always the last to return, and every morning Butter was home early. Chicken did not know that if Butter walked in the sun he would melt, and that was why he was always home first.

One morning, when they left the house, Chicken took the key and carried it away with her. When Butter came back, he could not get in. So he stood in the doorway and waited. When the sun came up Butter melted.

Now Chicken returned, and she saw what had happened to Butter. She ran and called her neighbor to come. When the neighbor came, Chicken said to him, she said, "What shall we do with Butter?"

The neighbor said, "Bring a knife and I will show you."

But Chicken had no sooner brought the knife than her neighbor took it, and cut Chicken's neck. Then he put her in the pot with Butter, and cooked the two.

And that is why to this day we cook Chicken with Butter. Now the neighbor was Cockroach, and the proverb says: "You are Cockroach; you will never get justice from Chicken."

Anansi Gives a Feast on the Mountain Top—Turtle Gives His in the Water

Anansi decided to give a feast. Now he did not want Turtle to come, but since he was inviting all the animals, he had to ask Turtle, too. He said, "I will see to it that the boy Turtle does not eat a morsel of my food." So Anansi sent word to all the animals that on a certain day he would give a great feast, but that it would be held on top of a mountain. On the day of the feast all the animals came together to eat with Anansi.

Now, when they were all gathered, and the preparations were done, Anansi said, "We are ready to eat, but before we can begin, all must have clean hands." And Anansi said to Rabbit, he said, "Ba Kon'koni, you are a clever fellow. Look around for me, and see if there is anyone whose hands have sand on them."

Rabbit went from one animal at the other, examining their hands. Then he came to Turtle. He said, "Friend Turtle, you must go wash your hands. See, there is sand on them." So Turtle went back down the hill to wash his hands. Now when Turtle walks, crawling he crawls from one place to another. He does not go fast. So the whole time he was away the animals had been eating. When he returned to the table, half the food was gone.

Now just as he sat down at the table, Anansi said, "Friend Turtle, let me see if your hands are clean now." Turtle showed his hands. Again they were full of sand. Anansi said, "Ba Turtle, the rules are that everybody must have clean hands, so you must go wash your hands once more. You cannot eat otherwise." So again Turtle washed his hands. He washed them so many times, but, since he could not walk any other way, his hands were always dirty when he came to the table. So Turtle did not eat at Anansi's feast.

Turtle went away, and he said, "Anansi caught me this time, but I am going to get even with him."

So now Turtle gave a birthday party. He sent for all the animals to come to his party to eat with him. He knew that Anansi would come, too. So he said that his party would be held under water. He knew that Anansi was light and would not be able to stay under water. He did this so he could catch Anansi.

When all the animals were getting ready to go to Turtle's, Anansi studied what to do. He knew that he could not stay down under water. So he borrowed a coat and a pair of

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trousers, and put them on. Then he gathered many stones, and put them in the pockets. When he was heavy enough, he went down under the water.

Now the time came for them to come and eat. Turtle looked about and saw Anansi under water. He saw how Anansi had put stones in his pockets. At once Turtle said to them all, he said, before they sit down at the table they must take off their coats. Anansi was troubled when he heard Turtle say this. He thought, "If I take off my coat, I will at once float to the surface. The stones in my pockets keep me down." So Anansi could not take off his coat.

But when Anansi came to the table, Turtle said to him, he said, "Didn't I say everybody was to take off his coat? You must take off yours. When you gave your feast you did as you liked. When I give mine, I do as I like, too."

So Anansi took off his coat.

But no sooner did Ba Anansi take it off, than he rose to the top of the water. He got no food to eat. His greed had caused this to happen to him.

Anansi Rides Tiger

One day Ba Anansi went to the house of the King and said to the King, he said, he rode Tiger.

The King said, "A little spider like you! It is another of your lies. I don't believe you. I will ask Tiger." But Anansi said, "King, you can believe me. You will see that it is true."

The King, however, sent a messenger to Tiger, asking him to come to him. Tiger was delighted that he was asked to go to the King's house. He wondered, "Now what kind of a message does the King have for me?"

But as he arrived at the King's house with such pleasant feelings, the King said to him, he said, "Tiger, does a strong animal like you allow little Anansi to ride him?" Tiger was angry. He said, "King, I will go at once and make Anansi come to you to tell you that he lied."

One of Anansi's children was playing in the village. He met Tiger on the road. Tiger said to him, he said, "You boy! Where is your father? I will show him if he can lie about me!"

Now Anansi had already told the boy what he had done. Anansi said to him, he said, "If you see Tata Tiger, then, when he asks for me, you must tell him I am sick. Tell him I have fever." So the boy said to Tiger, "Tata Tiger, my father is sick. He lies at home, shaking with fever."

But Tiger said, "That's no affair of mine. He must come to the King's house with me, even if I have to carry him!" So he went to Anansi's house, and said to his wife, "Sa Akuba, where is that boy Anansi?"

Sa Akuba answered, "Tata, he is sick. He has a bad fever."

But Tiger said, "Where is he? Let me see him." When Sa Akuba brought Tiger to Anansi's bed, Tiger said, "You boy Anansi! What was this you said at the King's house?"

Anansi said to him, he said, "Tata Tiger, I am sick. The King lied to you. I did not say anything."

"That makes no difference. You must come with me to the King's house."

"Tye, Tata Tiger! See how I am trembling! You can see that I cannot travel. Please wait until I am better!"

"No, no. I can't wait. You must come right now, this very day."

"All right, Tata. But I cannot walk. How am I going to get to the King's house?"

"Come sit on my back. I will carry you there."

Anansi waited for a moment. Then he said, "Tata, I have a small bag here and a blanket. May I take them with me to use when I get cold?"

"All right. Take them. But you must come right away."

So Anansi climbed up on Tiger's back, and Tiger went on his way toward the King's house. Anansi sat shivering there, and he shook so that Tiger called to him, "You boy, why do you do this? Sit still!"

"But Tata," said Anansi, "it is the fever. I have something here. Won't you let me put it in your mouth so that I can use it to hold on to?"

Tiger said, "All right," and hurried on. But Anansi shook again, and Tiger said once more, "You boy Anansi! Why do you do this? Do you think that if you carry on this way I won't take you to the King's house to show him how you lied?"

But Anansi said, "Tye, Tata, it is the fever. Look, I have something here that is like a saddle. Won't you wait until I can put my feet inside it so I can sit a little better?"

"That doesn't concern me, so long as we get on. Do what you like, so long as you go with me to the house of the King."

So Anansi put the saddle on Tiger, and they went on. When they had gone farther, Anansi saw the King's house facing them in the distance. He began to shake again. He shivered and shivered, and Tiger said, "You boy! Why are you carrying on so? When you see the King's house you begin to tremble, is that it? I will teach you to lie!"

Anansi only said, "Tata, it is the fever. I am shivering. It is the fever, and, besides, a mosquito just bit me."

"Didn't I tell you that was no affair of mine? Whether you shiver or whether you don't shiver, go you must. Don't you see the King's house, there ahead?"

"But Tata, I have one last favor to ask of you. I have a small whip here. Won't you let me strike at the mosquitoes with it? Then maybe I won't shiver so much."

"All right, I don't care. I only want to bring you to the King's house to show how you lied about an important man like me."

So Anansi had the bit and the saddle on Tiger, and his whip was in his hand. And when he saw all the people in front of the King's house, he gave Tiger three lashes with the whip. As Tiger jumped in the air, Anansi cried "Kon! Kon!" as though he were driving a horse, and Tiger became so angry that he started to run faster.

But Anansi pulled at the bit and called, "King! King! Come look at Anansi riding Tiger!"

And so the King said to Anansi, "Well, since you have brought me this horse, you can stay inside my house as long as you live." This is the reason why to this very day, Anansi lives inside the King's house.

The King's Beard

It is said, "There is nothing in darkness that will not come to light. . . . "

There was a King who had a very long beard. But he did not want anyone to know that he had a beard. But someone saw him when he did not think anyone was there. This was Ba Anansi. He became angry and called people to kill that person. For he did not wish anyone to know that he had a beard.

So they dug a great hole for Anansi. When they brought Anansi to the hole, he put his mouth to it and whispered, "The King has a beard-o. . . . " But no one heard him.

Three years later a tree sprang up, right where there was the hole to which Anansi had put his mouth. And marked across the bark of the tree was:

"The King has a beard-o!"

Tiger Entertains the Monkeys

It was a time of famine. Tiger had nothing to eat. He studied what to do. He went and made a large kettle, and he made a lid for the kettle. Then he called all the baboons together and said he was going to give a cinema play. They must come and see. When the baboons came, he went inside the kettle. He pretended that he was putting in the film, and he said when he called out "Warm!" they must take him out. Now he had put fire under the kettle, and when he called out "Warm!" the baboons raised the lid, and let him out.

He said, let all the baboons go inside the kettle now to see the cinema. But one young baboon did not go inside. He hid in a tree top, and from there he watched what was happening. Now, once the baboons were inside the kettle, the Tiger stirred the fire underneath it. So the baboons were cooked, and all were killed. And so Tiger came by his food.

Now, another time there was again famine. Tiger called together all the monkeys, and said let them come and see the cinema play. But this time when the monkeys came, the young baboon who hid in the tree top the last time, said to the monkeys, he said, "When Tiger goes inside the kettle, you must not lift the lid when he cries out, 'Warm!' You must say, 'When a thing is warm, then a man's teeth must show.' " And so, when the Tiger went into the kettle, and called out, the monkeys did not raise the lid. And so Tiger died.

Gun Is Dead

Anansi borrowed a gun from Hunter, and sent word to all the animals that they must come to bury Gun. Gun, he said, was dead. All the animals rejoiced to hear that Gun had died, for Gun was an evil thing. It was he who had been killing off all the animals in the bush. So they were happy to hear that their enemy, Gun, was dead, and they came to the funeral.

Now Anansi made a trap, and he put Gun inside it, and said they would go and bury him. But Anansi made everyone pass in front of the coffin, and the Gun was pointed right at them. His own children carried the trap, and Anansi himself sat on top of Gun.

When Anansi saw all the animals lined up in single file facing Gun, he began to shoot. All the animals died.

And so Anansi got food. Ba Anansi is very cunning.

How Goat Came to Live at Home

Goat went to make a shelter. He cut one post and put it down, and went for another. But now when he brought the second, he found many posts alongside of the one he himself had put there. Back into the bush he went now for palm leaves, but when he returned, there was the shelter all made. Tiger had made it. And so Goat and Tiger met, and they talked it over, and they decided they would live together.

Now they made one condition. Goat was to go in search of food one day, and Tiger the next day. The first day Tiger went. He made a kill, and brought it home, and they ate. When Goat went, he killed nothing. The following day Tiger went. He made a kill, and brought it home. The day after Goat went and killed nothing.

Now, one day, Tiger went and killed a deer, and brought him home. But Goat would not eat, because Deer is Goat's uncle, and if he had eaten the meat, then he would have been eating his own uncle. But Tiger was angry. He said, "Day after day you ate what I killed, but today you refuse to eat. Yet when you yourself go, you kill nothing, and bring nothing home."

And now when the little Tigers played with the little Goats, the little Tigers said, "My father will show you-all!"

Mother Goat said, "As Father Tiger talks, so the children of Father Tiger talk." And she told the little Goats to watch out for Tiger, because already Tiger had killed their uncle. But Father Goat said all little Negro children must play together.

Now Goat went to hunt, and he met Man. He said to Man, "Day after day I go hunting, but I never kill." Then Man gave him something, and he said to Goat, "When you see an animal coming toward you, point at it, and call out 'Take care!' and that instant the animal will fall down dead."

Just as Goat took the thing Man gave him, he saw Tiger's grandfather approaching. He pointed his finger, and called out, "Take care!" That moment grandfather Tiger was dead. Goat brought him home. But now, when he came, Tiger would not eat, because the dead animal was his grandfather.

The following day, Goat went again. This time he killed Tiger's brother, and brought him home. Tiger would not eat.

But now the little Goats said to the little Tigers, "Father will show you-all!"

And Mother Tiger said to Father Tiger he had better look out for Goat. Twice he had gone to the bush to hunt,

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and twice Goat had brought back with him members of their family. And so when Goat again went hunting, Tiger followed him softly, and as he spied on Goat, he saw his uncle Tiger coming. And he saw how Goat pointed at him and called out, "Take care!" and how that very instant his uncle Tiger fell down dead.

Father Tiger hurried home, and said to Mother Tiger and the little Tigers, "Let us escape at once. Goat has something which he points at whomever he meets. When he does it and calls out 'Take care!' they all die."

And Tiger and his whole family made off into the bush as fast as they could go. They left the house to Goat.

So it is ended. And so it is that when someone boasts of the strength of his clan, or his family, or his clan's magic, or his own spirits, then we say to him:

"*There are men on the upper river,*
There are men on the lower river, too!"

Chapter VIII

PARENTS, CHILDREN, AND GRANDCHILDREN

I

512 WE WERE aroused early after our night of stories. The women were moving about, getting their morning meal before daybreak came to give them light for their harvesting. There was much they had to do. Late that afternoon they would be returning to their [529] villages, for the next day was sacred to the Earth Mother, and no work could be done in the fields. Today, added to the round of harvesting were the preparations for the return to their village. The rice that had been cut during the week would have to be carried there for drying and winnowing, and yams and peanuts and beans were to be brought in.

136 Not far off, in the bush, the "baboons" were crying. We had been told how these howling monkeys lived in bands, and how they had an "old man" for leader. Their strange cries, ringing through the forest, sounded like despair made articulate. A terribly moving reiteration of four or five wailing notes went on and on, rising slowly in volume, until their cries blotted out all other sounds, and then, like a wave receding, diminishing until quiet reigned again. But when we had given up listening for its distant echo, there it was again, filling the darkness of the clearing with despair, until, at its very height, we heard the low, penetrating grunts of their "*G'aman*—Chief" and instantly all was still. They were done for the night. With daylight, they would go deeper into the bush.

Soon our men, too, began to stir, and, as we came out of our hammocks, Bayo and Angita entered the clearing. They were just now returning from the dance at Pa'aba. 580

"*A-yo, a baya kebi!*—Yes, they danced hard," Bayo told us. "Obia came strong."

With Angita was a man we had not seen before, holding a small child by the hand. 611 602

"This is Awingu, my brother-in-law," said Angita in explanation. "His eyes trouble him. I brought him to you for medicine."

After the exchange of courtesies demanded by the visit, we turned to the child.

"Is this your child, Awingu?" we asked.

His answer came promptly. "No, he is not my child. He is my wife's child. I made him."

Here was a fine distinction. He made him, but the child was not his.

Just then our cook came up with a small present for the child, but, since he would not take it from his hands or ours, Angita gave it to him.

"Thank you, father," he said to Angita.

Angita looked down affectionately at the youngster. "Two, three years more, Awingu, and he will be ready to go and live with his father at Gankwe. Do you remember your father at Gankwe? It was he who showed you how to make a gun from a reed. And you made it well. . . . "

There appeared, then, to be yet another father, for it was clear that Angita was not speaking of himself when he referred to the Gankwe father who had showed the child how to make a play gun.

All this, in itself, however confusing to a visitor, is by no means an unusual phenomenon. Different peoples have their own sanctions for establishing kinship and their own designations for relationships. In the city we had been told many tales of the manner of life of these Negroes of the bush. And the "matriarchate," as the custom of counting descent through the mother was termed, had often come up when these people were being discussed.

611
602 "Among them only the mothers count, because among savages, who can tell who the real father is? That is why a child calls many men 'father,'" we had heard variously explained and elaborated.

Yet here was a man who said without hesitation, "No, he is not my child. He is my wife's child. I made him." And the very next instant the child called Angita father, and Angita referred to still another man as the father who would in a few years take the child with him to live and train him for manhood.

Any number of questions came to our minds, but at daybreak a stranger coming to the planting ground of a village not his own is the least willing of talkers.

"This is not your child, Awingu," we took the occasion to remark when we were saying goodbye, "yet he seems to like you very much."

"*Ma, tye! Ma Neng'e!*—Mother of all Negroes! What would you have? I am his father!"

The man showed by his amused expression that this was a story to carry back to his village. Only the politeness due a stranger kept Awingu and Angita from laughing aloud at this strange question. But Awingu was a thoughtful fellow. "Tell me," he said, after a while, "in your white man's country, don't children care for their fathers?"

2

602 But there were not only multiple fathers, as the story told in the city ran. The matter was not disposed of so simply as that. In point of fact, each person seemed to have several mothers as well. Take the case of Angita himself, whose brother-in-law we met at dawn in the provision ground. Angita was first pointed out to us by Tita, who, behind her back, was called Mother Snake. It was at Gankwe when we came to see the dancing for the dead Zimbi.

"Look," she had said, as she indicated one of the principal dancers who wore seed rattles at his ankles. "This is

Angita. He dances well. He is my son." And she had showed her pleasure at our appreciation of his excellent dancing.

The following day Angita came to our camp, bringing with him Kutai, a woman of about Tita's age. He left to go farther upstream for a time, but she remained with us and sat and talked with the others who were standing about, as they discussed the wood carvings we were in the act of buying.

"Have you seen Angita's carvings?" she asked us. "He is one of the best young carvers at Gankwe. When he is older, he will be one of the best on the Saramacca."

An old man standing by said drily, "Chicken says, 'You can lie about an egg, but you can't lie about a chicken.'"

"That's right," commented another. "We know Angita's carving. It is good, but. . . ."

But Kutai would not be contradicted. She interrupted the speaker with a gesture. "I am his mother, and a mother knows her son. You can say what you like."

About the fifth day after we had started up the river for the country of the Granman, we came to a village where Angita stopped to supplement his food for the journey. When he returned, his arms were filled with the large cassava cakes. Behind him came a young girl with a bottle of palm oil, and some rice in an open calabash, and she was followed by the people of the village who came to see the Bakra. A woman of middle age, whom both the young girl and Angita resembled, took the rice from the girl and, wading into the shallow water, came up to our boat and gave it to us. "This is rice for you. I am Angita's mother. Angita is strong. You will walk well with him."

Later that day, when our boat found itself abreast of the dugout which Angita was poling, we lost no time in questioning him.

"Angita," we called, "is the woman who gave us the rice your mother?"

He nodded.

"But what of Tita, who said she was your mother, too?"

602 He was a quick-witted lad, and he saw at once what we had in mind. He said with a laugh, "You are asking about my true, true mother, the one who made me? It is not this one, and it is not Tita, who made me. It is Kutai."

"But who are the other two?"

"They are her sisters."

3

593 Yet the family life of the Bush Negro does not differ in any essential respect from that of any other group of individuals, who, related by close ties of blood, live their lives together. Men and women marry and beget children, and their children in turn marry and beget others. In reality, but for the fact that a man or a woman claimed more than one father and mother, and a great number of brothers and sisters, of uncles and aunts, there was little to indicate the existence of conventions of family life which differed radically from those we ourselves know.

None the less, there were differences, and, once we were permitted to see beneath the surface, a slight incident here, another hint there, threw into relief the life of these people, and their own attitudes toward their actual and spiritual relationships.

Let us take the instance of Misomba and his son. Misomba was a man of middle age, and the incident we tell occurred as we were sitting in his house in a village above the Mamadam. He was speaking of the wood he had cut and of his plans to take it to the city to sell. With him in the house were his wife and a young lad, perhaps fifteen or sixteen years old, and, besides ourselves, our paddler Kasanya, who was Misomba's wife's elder brother.

"I need someone to take the rafts down the river. There are none in my family who are free, and I need help. But Adyabu here," he said, indicating his son, "knows about taking down rafts, and it will be good for him to learn more of the river leading to the white man's city. I am glad you came, brother-in-law. Now I can ask you if he may go with me. Is it your wish that he go?"

Kasanya glanced at the boy, who showed by his manner his eagerness to accompany his father, and then at his sister. "How will it be with you, sister, if Adyabu goes? Do you want him to go with Misomba?" 593 607

"Yes," she replied. "Misomba will care for him. Let him go."

The three older people talked over the details of the trip down the river, until it was made clear to all that Adyabu would share whatever money his father might receive for the lumber.

"You will treat him well, brother-in-law," said Kasanya, with a smile, "for in a few years his girl will be ripe for marrying, and he will need money for a fine wedding."

That night we talked this over with Kasanya.

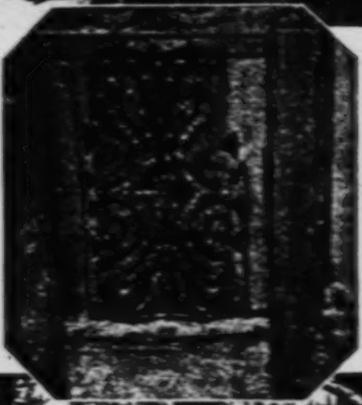
"Why must a man ask another if he may take his own son with him on a journey? Is a man not to be trusted to take care of a boy he himself has made?"

"You do not understand, Bak'a. It is not that we don't trust Misomba," he replied. "He has lived with my sister for many years. She is his first wife, and my family have always liked him. When my sister's eldest daughter was asked in marriage by a man of this village, and our great family came together here to consider whether we should promise her to him or not, we asked Misomba to give us his advice. Misomba does not have a bold face. He did not speak until after much urging. To ask a man's advice about what does not concern his own family is a great honor. But we did this, and when he spoke, we found that what he said was good. So, you see, it is not that we do not trust Misomba."

We encouraged him to explain further.

604 428 "Adyabu is not his heir. He is the child of my sister and belongs to my family. I am the one to say what he is to do and what he is not to do, because I am the oldest living brother. Adyabu does not belong to Misomba's family. He is of my blood. When I die, he will inherit my possessions. When Misomba dies, his possessions will go to his own

Dwelling houses.



Carved door of a man's house (*right*).

A *gadu wosu*—man's personal house.

[Facing p. 130]

(Facing page 130)

604 brothers and to his sisters' children. That is how we live
428 here in the bush. That is how we do."

4

591 When a man marries, he either arranges to take his wife to live in his own village—his mother's village—or to stay in that of his wife. Whether he chooses the one village or the other, he has to build a house there for her, and this becomes her *wosu*, her household. If he wishes, he may build two houses, one in his own village, and one in the village of his wife. Kasanya's younger brother built two houses for his first wife. One was on the lower river, next to Kasanya's own house, and the other we would reach after two days' further travel up the river.

Yet the man, explained Kasanya, if the couple were living in the village of the wife, or the woman, if their house was in his village, was not entirely at home. In one's own village a person was a *gomi*, a child of the "ground." He belonged there. But when living in another's village, even though it was that of a husband or wife, one was a
[609] *wakama'*, a stranger, and if a man of the village but uttered this word "wakama'" to such an individual, the outsider had to take up his belongings and leave at once. Were the
[688] stranger, in turn, to speak aloud the word "gomi," disaster would follow, for the earth spirits, having been disturbed, would be sure to take their toll.

594 The *wosu*—the household—is the unit of family life, whether, in its physical location, it is in one village or two villages. In it a woman lives with her husband, and here the
596 children are reared. After the wosu comes the larger family unit, the *mbe*, composed of those who have come from the common womb of a more remote ancestress, while several of
[614] these larger or extended families form a clan.

"If a man has more than one wife," said Kasanya, "then
595 he makes more than one house. A man never puts two wives in the same house. It would not be good. Each woman has her own house, where she lives with her children. It must be so. The children of the first wife belong to her

family. The children of the second wife belong to the 595
family of the second wife. A woman calls her husband's
other wife by the name of kambosa. Do you know what
kambosa means?" he asked, laughing. "*Kambosa*—the
woman who makes trouble for me. So, you see, we people
of the bush learned from our ancestors to give each
wife her own house, where she might live with her own
children."

But not alone the woman needed to have a house of her 342
own. The man, too, built a house for himself. In it he stored 423
his possessions. It was his sanctuary. No woman might
enter it. On the carving of its door, a man lavished all his [531]
love of ornamentation, all his artistry.

"A man likes to have his own house for his possessions," explained Kasanya. "If he is a rich man, it is better that his wives do not know how much he has. You know what women are. They always ask for presents. But if a man is not rich, then it is better still that his wives do not know it. If they know, they will make life hard for him with nagging. They will talk of leaving him. And all the village will know, too."

In this house, then, which a man built for his wife, the 592
children were reared. Sometimes, it is true, if the harvests 604
were poor or the father had met with ill luck, the mother's
brothers would come for the children, for children are the [858]
ones to carry on the line. It is through them that clan rank [428]
and material goods are inherited.

But if all went well with the father, then the attachments 592
of the household were the closest, and they continued even 768
after death. For the household was not entirely disrupted
after the death of a parent. Unless the one who died had
been a sorcerer, a leper, or a madman, the house where he
lived was not torn down.

"When a man dies," Kasanya said, "the wife goes on 768
living in the house, once it has been purified. If a woman
dies, then the man keeps on living there."

"What of the children?" we asked. "What becomes of them?"

768 "If it is the man who is dead, then the woman takes her
775 girl children to live with her, but her sons she sends away to
live elsewhere. A man's spirit will not harm his daughters.
He loves them. But his sons, he will kill. . . . When a
woman dies, then it is the sons that the man will keep with
him in the house, and the daughters must go away. The
yorka of a woman will protect her sons, but she will destroy
the daughters when she visits the place where she once
lived."

5

602 To her child the Bush Negro mother gives at birth
851 membership in all her own blood groups. The child is of her
wosu, or household. He belongs to her *mbe*, or great family,
which is an aggregate of many households. He is a member
of her *lo*, or clan, which is composed of a number of great
families, and which holds political sway over a given
613 portion of the land. The tie of all these groupings is a blood
tie, a common female ancestress who lived long ago, or
several women, daughters of the same mother, who had
been the first to live with the runaway ancestors here in the
bush, or several women who came from one people in
Africa, and were the first to bear children to the rebels in the
jungle. Every legal, every economic implication which this
tradition of descent and inheritance through the female line
might hold, is faithfully adhered to.

611 The mother does indeed count, as the tales told us in the
593 city insisted. But what of the father?

That the Bush Negro understands fully the rôle that
842 both father and mother play in the procreation of the
532 young was everywhere apparent. The wood carving which
a father made for his young daughter had designs on it of
the kind which bore the general designation "*womi ko' muye*—man and woman." Whatever the traceries on the
carvings given by a man to his woman during courtship,
or after marriage, whatever animals might be represented,
the essential symbolism was that of fertility, and the

figures of a male and a female in congress were often introduced into the design. 842 532

The ignorance of the physical rôle of the male parent, said to exist among other primitive peoples with a similar 842 linkage of relatives on the mother's side, is not found among the Suriname Negroes. At a religious ceremony in which townspeople alone were dancing, a woman turned to us, and said, "Now they are dancing Afrekete. When *Ma Aisa*—an Earth goddess—and *Pa Lebba*—he who guards the crossroads—make a child, it is called Afrekete." Similar genealogies of spirits were vouchsafed us by Bush Negroes as well, and always, there was the male god as well as the female, and always the recognition that both made the spirit which was their offspring.

These are examples derived from the art of the people, 593 from their ritual, and from the concepts they have of the forces that actuate the universe. There also were many incidents to show the attitude of fathers and children toward each other in the everyday run of life.

Awingu did not hesitate when he answered that the child who was with him belonged to his wife. But he added that it was he who made him, and his affection for the little boy, and the child's fondness for him was apparent even to the casual onlooker. Kasanya, in talking to us about the kunu of his wife's family which had destroyed his sons, mourned them as a father. He had made them, and he had taught them to run the rapids, and to carve. He had given them his own gods to protect them, he told us when recounting the tragedy of the kunu which killed them. Misomba, the brother-in-law of Kasanya, had made Adyabu. There was no ambiguity about who the boy's father was. The boy was Kasanya's heir, but he was Misomba's son. Sedefo had brought the child to his brother Zimbi's coffin, saying, "I bring you your child. Try to protect him. . . ."

There was the matter of slipping. It is dangerous to 774 slip. Losing one's step may bring the soul to the ground 776 in an unguarded moment, where the earth spirits, or what

774 776 would be more serious yet, an evil spirit who would be lying in wait for a soul to use as emissary in his affairs of black magic, would snatch at the soul and take it away. If [153] this happened, a person would sicken, languish, and die. Sometimes when a man tripped on the clayey bank, we heard him exclaim, "*Ago!*—Ancestors!" calling on these to protect him until he recovered his balance. But often we [182] heard different cries. "Mi, Awana!" one man had called. "Mi, Nyamfai!" or, "Mi, Matchau!" or "Mi, Popoto!" [614] These are all clan names, and for a time we assumed that instead of appealing to their ancestors, they called on the entire clan to come to their aid. But one day Sedefo lost his footing, and we heard him exclaim, "Mi, Fandaki!" Now we knew that Sedefo belonged to the clan of the Gankwe people, and we knew, further, that he was most emphatically not of the Fandaki clan.

"Sedefo, you are not a Fandaki. Why did you call on them?"

"My father belongs to the Fandaki. When we slip we call on our father's lo."

"Why, Sedefo?"

"I do not know. . . . "

605 Another day we were sitting and talking to a young man in an upper river village. A girl came and sat with us. "This is my sister," the man said. It was at a time when we were looking into these matters, and we asked, "Did the same mother make you both?"

"No," he answered, "she is here only on a visit. She lives across the river. Her father is my mother's brother."

"But she is not your sister, then," we said. "She does not even belong to your clan."

"Massa Neng'e! But she is my sister!" the man protested. "She is neither of my family, nor of my clan. But did not my mother's brother make her?"

"Could you marry her?"

[582] He considered for a moment. "It would be possible. But it would not be good. . . . And the old women in the village would talk too much."

This was not the only instance of our meeting an individual who liked to stay in her father's village. There was the girl Takuda. Her mother was of the Kasito clan, and her house was in Dahomey, its principal settlement. She was not happy among her mother's people, and when we met her, she was living with her father's family. 593

"Does her mother's family not want her with them?" we asked a friend with whom we were discussing her.

He shrugged his shoulders. "Should not a child live in her father's home if she wants to?" he answered simply. "A father likes his children, and they like him, too."

Nor was it strange. To the child, the father was a man of the older generation to whom he could come for sympathy. He rarely corrected, for this was the task of the mother and her family. Often it was he who interceded with the older people in behalf of a son who wished to do something which his maternal family opposed. If a father gave small gifts to his children, they were looked upon truly as gifts. The ritual obligations of gift-giving chiefly lay with the mother's side. [431]

But there was more than just the affection for a boon companion which children felt for their fathers. There was pride in the father, pride in his achievements, and identification with his village.

When the Granman told us he was arranging for us to visit the village across the river from his own, he said, "Today you will see my father's house. Let them shoot guns so that I may know when you arrive in my father's village. They will show you everything. It is a fine village," he ended, with pride. "It is my father's country."

The last phrase was a refrain which ran through our entire visit there.

"This is the village of the Granman's father," we heard, again and again. "This is the house of the father of the Granman," one said, and another, "This is where the father of the Granman would sit in krutu." This person and that were introduced as belonging to the family of the father of the Granman. The climax came when we were shown the shrine to the ancestors. An especially elaborate [198]

593 place was pointed out to us. The carved representation of
778 the human face of the image was worked more carefully than is ordinarily done. Here the white clay was applied more thickly. The white cloth hanging from its stick was larger than we had ever seen before, the offerings of food and bottles and calabashes more numerous than at other ancestral shrines.

"This is where the yorka of the father of the Granman comes," we were told.

But why the father? What of the mother, the parent to whom the Granman was related? This village did not even belong to the Matchau clan to which he himself belonged. Yet with the pride that this was the shrine to the spirit of the Granman's father went a realization of its importance. Here was something outside the legal order, something which transcended the facts of descent and the theory of relationship. It was becoming ever more evident that in this "matriarchate" the father did count.

6

424 The inheritance of the father's kunu was one instance
776 where the father needed to be taken very much into account. "If this man's children should take some of his goods," they had said, pointing at things we could see through the slats of the dead man's treasure house in the village of Opoku, "they will get his kunu, too. No man wants that."

784 Then there was the *trefu*, or *tchina*—taboo—as it was called in the bush, of which our cook had told us. Every
262 individual in the bush had his tchina. Everyone knew the things he must not eat, or must not do. One man had to abstain from eating *anumara*, the great fish of the river. Another might never sleep in the open without a roof over his head. Should he find himself out in the bush with night coming, he must stop early enough to erect a small shelter and thatch it that his head might be covered when he slept. Bayo, we soon learned, might not eat food out of the cooking pot, and Sedefo could not bathe in a creek. Kasanya

did not eat deer's meat, or his brother-in-law the meat 784
of the bush-hog. 262

There are many kinds of tchina. There are the obia tchina. A man wearing or carrying with him a charm—an 789
obia—will have several prohibitions imposed on him. If 784
these are observed, the potency of the magic in the object given him will remain, but if they are violated, it will become a worthless ornament. When an obia is bought, its maker will take the hands of the man for whom he has made it in his, and pass his own lightly over them, blowing softly, so that the power of the spirit he had called upon when making it may enter into the man for whom the obia was made. Then the obia man will lean over and whisper, that no one might overhear, "When you wear this, do not get into a boat backwards," or, perhaps, "Never eat crab meat while you have this about your neck," or [262]
"Do not eat cassava and rice out of the same calabash."

But with the personal tchina it is otherwise. At birth 784
each individual falls heir to a number of taboos. They come 424
to him from his father. When a woman is with child she [843]
observes her husband's taboos as well as her own, for the child might otherwise be harmed in the womb by being nurtured on what is hateful to his father, and therefore to himself, since his father's taboos are his own. Male and female children take these tchina from the father. Their mother's tchina are no concern of theirs. Those which she observes had come to her from her own father. What makes the father ill will make the children ill, too. This holds for their entire lives, and the male children transmit their tchina from generation to generation.

A simple instance of this is the one which happened at our base camp when Bayo, who we knew could not eat out of a cooking pot, came one day to ask us for a dish. "My father forgot his eating dish. Will you let him use one of yours? He cannot eat out of a cooking pot."

When one man says of another, therefore, "He has the [602]
same tchina I have," he is saying that the two of them are related in the father's line.

602
784 But when one man shares a tchina with another it does not mean that they only share prohibitions. There are privileges as well. There is the right to lift a *kandu*, for example.

789 The outsider among the Bush Negro people cannot go long without learning of kandu. Many times we had noticed a small bundle of twigs hanging from a nail over a doorway of an uninhabited hut, or had remarked a small strip of colored cloth and a feather or two knotted together and swinging from an orange tree, or a calabash filled with hardened sacred clay, suspended from a limb where a creek entered the river. When we asked about them, we learned that each was a kandu, a spiritual lock, which by the potency of the magic put into it by the maker protected the house, or the tree, or the fishing creek—whatever we happened to be discussing at the moment—from thieves. It was a guard which no man dared violate.

Bayo had made one for us early in our visit to the Suriname bush.

"I will make you something to keep away thieves. I will make you a kandu."

He had asked us for a needle, and from wood of a special kind which is used only in kandu he fashioned the representation of a human head. Some native fiber and two kinds of sacred grass held the needle and the carved image together. This he covered with white clay, the sacred pemba, and the red coloring of the kuswe plant, which is also sacred. When he had spoken his invocations, and dipped the kandu in the river to purify it, he brought it to us.

"Put it where you keep your money. I have put strong magic into it. Your possessions will be safe. Anyone who opens the chest and sees this, will not touch what is inside. . . . But do not eat out of a cooking pot. It will lose its power. I have given it my own tchina."

But it seemed that a kandu did not always remain inviolate.

[593] "It would not be good," Bayo explained, "if a man went away and left a kandu over the house, and no one but he

could enter it until he took the kandu away. Suppose a 789 593
man went to hunt, and a friend came back to the village with a message from the hunter to get something inside the house. If no one at all could get it, it would not be good."

"What happens then?"

"The friend would seek out the man's own child—a child the man himself had made—and ask him to lift the kandu."

"Suppose his wife lifted it? Or his sister's child?"

"They wouldn't. The spirit in the kandu would punish them. His true, true child could touch the kandu, and his brother, or his sister, or his brother's children," said Bayo.

"The sisters' children?" we asked again.

"No, no! They would lift their own father's kandu."

Was there anyone else, we inquired, who could remove the kandu from a man's house?

Bayo considered. "Anyone who is born with the same tchina can lift it," he said, finally. "Those with the same tchina have the same fathers. Those whose fathers are the same, a kandu cannot harm."

7

We were talking one night with some men of the Anago 628
clan.

"Is it true," asked one, "that in the Negro country there are great warriors, and many wars?"

In olden times, we said, it was true, but today the African peoples were at peace.

"So it is now on the Saramacca River," he replied, but with a laugh he added, "Sometimes there are quarrels."

For instance, there had been a quarrel on the river not very long ago over lumber which had been cut by members of one clan on land belonging to another. The men knew they had no right to the timber, but they cut it down. The first time they were warned, and fines were demanded. The second time it happened, however, the men of the clan who owned the bush where these trees stood surprised the trespassers, and beat them.

628 "Yes," the man went on, "and there was much trouble." The men who had been punished incited their entire clan to come to their aid in an attack on the clan villages of those who had chastized them. "But now they are at peace." Those who were beaten were of his own clan, he said.

"And did you win your fight? What happened after that?"

"I did not go with the men. The land where the trees stood belonged to my father's clan, and my father's people I would not fight."

"What did you do?"

"I tried to make peace between them. That is what a man does when his father's clan and his mother's clan have trouble. But I was too young to speak in the big krutu—the assembly of the chiefs—so it was the elders of the Nyamfai people who brought them together, and settled the matter."

There was a point which we wanted cleared up. What was the attitude of the group toward a man who did not enter into a fight which concerned his own clan?

"Did no one say you ought to fight, too?" we asked, explaining our question to the man several times.

"No, why should they? A man can't fight against his father's people. Everybody knows that."

"But what if you did?"

"The gods would turn against my side."

After our return down river, when we again sat in the hut of the headman of the Gankwe clan, we turned to him with some questions about the family, and he gave us the following summary.

593 [614] 424 604 "From our mother we get our *lo*, our clan, and our *mbe*, our great family. Our mother's brothers are those we must obey. They correct us when we do wrong. They tell us what is good. In our mother's village is our true home, and from there we are buried when we die. But our father is our friend. He gives us his advice. From him we get many of the gods we dance to when we are men, and from him we

get the tchina which, if we do not break them, will let us stay healthy. Both our parents care for us." 593 424 604

He thought for a moment, and then, with a laugh, he wondered as Awingu had wondered that early morning at the planting ground.

"Is it not so in your country, Bak'a," he said, "that you ask me so often about these things?"

8

"Massa cow," we heard Bayo call out again and again to his great-grandfather Bibifo, when he wanted to indicate to the old man that he knew what he was about. Bibifo accepted the reproof with unvarying meekness and good humor. 603 888

This relationship between them puzzled us. Yet the other men, overhearing Bayo's brusque words to Bibifo, made nothing of it. Before strangers, Bayo was subdued, shy. He stuttered ceremonially when he addressed a man of rank. [576] He pitched his voice only a little above a whisper when he was in a strange village. Toward Kasanya and Sedefo and Asikanu he was respectful, and showed reserve. When he wanted his hair trimmed he came to Angita for help, or, better still, to the young man at the prow of Kasanya's boat who, like Kasanya, was of his own clan.

The old man was not a forceful fellow. That was, perhaps, the reason, we thought at first. Then we wondered if it was not because Bibifo had become Adrian, and no longer wore obias to carry him well on the water—because he had forsaken the old gods. But the other men treated Bibifo with the respect due an old man. When Kasanya killed a monkey, and his own pole-man could not share it with him because he was a twin and twins did not eat monkey, he turned to Bibifo with the pole-man's portion, [845] [262] and not to Sedefo, or to Asikanu, who was the brother of a clan head, and himself a possible successor to his brother's chieftainship.

888 We had had occasion to observe a not dissimilar manner of interchange between a young girl and an elderly woman in one village after another.

In one such village, a girl, who did not yet have her breasts, answered an old woman's reprimand with, "No, kambo, I will go down to the river later."

Kambo! She who makes trouble for me. . . .

The old woman said nothing.

603 888 The most striking instance, however, occurred in the village of the Granman. Moana Yankuso was held in no little fear everywhere on the river. It was not his rank alone as headman of all the clans, however, that had won him the reputation of a man to be obeyed. He was a powerful man, a great politician, and in every sense a personality, a man who knew how to dominate men and situations. One day in his council house, while he was surrounded by his chiefs, who sat on the low stools, their heads averted from him as is the way when men are in the presence of the great, the plaid strip of cloth which covered the door was brushed aside, and a young man entered. He took up a stool, brought it close to the Granman, and sat down. But he did not avert his face nor did he wait to be addressed.

"Howdo, mati," said he to the Granman, "I hear you want to see me."

We waited for the swift and terrible rebuke which the chief could give. None came.

"I sent for you," began the Granman, "because the Bak'a is leaving us. I am sending the captain of the village to take charge of the boat the white man and his woman will travel in. You will take the front paddle of the boat. You will see to it that his journey is pleasant. You must take care in going through the rapids. . . . "

"Mati," interrupted the young man, and his manner did not disguise his impatience with the injunctions of the Granman. "Mati, I am a man. I know how to run a boat. Why do you tell me all this?"

Instead of finding fault with the forward youth, the Granman turned to us and said, "You will be safe with him. He has taken boats up and down the Marowyne. He is my grandson. If I had one of my own blood, I would have had him accompany you. . . . But my sisters' children sleep," he ended, using the euphemism for death. 603 888

When we came to know the young man, we asked him about this incident with the Granman. Was he not afraid to interrupt him?

"Ma kye! But he is my grandfather! With my grandfather I make sport."

Again we went to the old men and sought in village after village for their own explanation of this behavior toward grandparents.

There were, we learned, age distinctions that were deeply felt. A man was on easy terms with those of his own generation. Between parents and children, and those of the generation of their parents, however, there was a definite code of behavior. For example, no young man or woman might talk of sexual matters with either parent, and this lack of sanction for frankness in sexual discussions with parents became an actual taboo with parents-in-law. Encounters with the "pai" and "mai," as they were known, were hemmed in by countless prohibitions. A man might not sleep in the same house with either of them, nor might he eat with them out of the same dish. If he met either of his parents-in-law as he went along the path, he had to turn aside, make way for them, and cover his face. He might not pronounce their names, nor might they speak his. These observances held for women, too, and the ones we mention were by no means all. 561 576 606 [593] [831]

With grandparents, however, a vastly different situation obtained. 603

"He is my grandson. I call him mati—friend. I make sport with him!"

"She is my granddaughter. She calls me husband. She makes free with me!"

"She is my granddaughter, we talk about everything. She calls me kambo, and I call her kambo." Again, we

603 were told that kambo was an abbreviated form of kambosa, and meant the woman who makes trouble.

"He is my grandson, he calls me wife, and I call him
[522] husband. We joke together about everything."

Up and down the river we heard these expressions from the old men and women with whom we talked, and to them these were all-sufficient explanations of the relationship of grandparent and grandchild. This making free was a verbal give-and-take that did not stop at brusqueness or teasing. Indeed, those who indulged in this freedom might discuss with each other any phase of the sexual life. Nor did they need to resort to any evasion or circumlocution. There seemed, moreover, to be a sanction for emphasis on the obscene and the lascivious in these conversations—obscene and lascivious, that is, from the point of view of those who were themselves speaking!

603 The effect of the custom is interesting. It acts as a form
182 of release for the young, who are held down under the strain of paying respect to those who are older and of greater experience. It is a way of escape from the discipline imposed by the parents and those of their generation.

What did the Bush Negro make of it?

We talked about it with men and women of many villages, and invariably the answer was the same.

"So we live in the bush, white man, and so we do. Our ancestors did this before us. Long ago our great ancestors brought all this knowledge with them from *Neng'e Kond'e*—from the land of the Negroes."

Yet in the beliefs of these people, and in their life as they live it, there are to be found a few suggestive hints which seem to have some bearing on this custom of verbal license between grandparents and grandchildren.

603 The Bush Negro child is given many names at birth,
[551] and one name is usually that of a departed ancestor, a deceased grandparent. It may be, then, that this puts the child on a plane of spiritual equality with his grandparents and with those of their generation who are related to him. There is, also, the feeling about the propriety of the mar-

riage of persons whose ages differ greatly. It may be that the grandparental generation is considered safe against infractions of this element in the code of proper behavior, and that the reticence about matters of sex, which is insisted upon between a child and those of the generation of his parents, has been proved to be unnecessary in the case of those so much older than the young person. Yet these, in the very nature of the case, are speculations. Whatever the reasons may be, the Bush Negro does not trouble himself about them.

"But my grandfather is my mati! With him I make sport!"

Chapter IX

A NIGHT AT S'EI

1

133 137 FROM day to day the mood of the river changed, and the mood of the bush changed with it. The dankness of the river bank gave way to the smell of red, sun-scorched earth. No longer was the farther shore the forbidding wall of a great canyon. The flowering lianas, as they climbed a hundred feet and more from the roots of the trees they had enveloped, were making of it a tapestry. The blooms which showed against the masses of green seemed at first of the palest yellow with threads of white, or yellow with glints of gold in them, or the faintest of orange and violet. Later when the flaming gold, the scarlet and purple clusters appeared, they still did not mar the somber weave of the timeless pattern, for the deep note of this bush in any season is green, and no pushing, garish colors, no conceits of turning leaves or fragrant flowers can sound an echo here. As well expect the brilliantly tinted butterflies cruising from one bank to the other to make a whir in their passage, as to look for it to be otherwise. [136]

The air, however, became steadily drier, the green more varied and pleasing, and the land rising and sloping gave an occasional glimpse of a horizon. If something in the shade of the river banks still spoke of the way of the constrictor, the sudden lashing out of the tail, there was now also the pleasant consciousness of its long lethargy. The swish of wings overhead, when we walked for short intervals through

the uncleared bush, or the sight of a snake twined about a 133
liana, no longer struck terror, and the flaying rains which 137
came down so suddenly, and as suddenly were over, no [130]
longer even aroused uneasiness.

At the prow of our boat Bayo poled vigorously and 533
continued his countless variants of the seketi song we had 186
been hearing everywhere on the river, while Bibifo had made a refrain of our question, "How do you say this in your Saramacca language?" He would paddle in silence for a long time, only to begin muttering at the most unexpected moments, "Sa'macca tongo!" in the way of an old man who talks to himself. He would then repeat it over and over in ridicule of us, and sometimes in a singsong voice he would improvise lines about the white man who wanted to know how everything was called in the true, true Saramacca language, and how all that was told him he wrote down in a book.

"Great-grandfather," we would say to him, "why do you say this? Isn't it all right for us to want to learn how to talk to the G'aman?"

"*Kere-kere*—It's all right."

But having said this, he would engage Bayo in conversation, clipping his words, and using so much idiom and parable as utterly to confound us.

"Your language is difficult, great-grandfather."

"Ya-hai, it is meant for the people of the bush, white man," he would say with a pride we had not looked for from the mild Bibifo, who was now called Adrian. There
was, it appeared, potency in the "word," and magic. The [552]
names for things, and the things themselves were one. The knowledge of Saramacca names belonged to the Saramacca people, and whether as Bibifo or Adrian, he was above all a Saramacca Negro, and a member of an important clan.

2

When we had been seven days on the river, our cook 000
came to us and said he wanted to talk about something we had best know.

776
609 "The gods are friendly to you, Massa. The men have all noticed it. You look upon trees and falls with pleasure. When you see them, it is as if you met with a friend. That is good. But the gods have their powers, and men have theirs. The Rabbit says, 'Evil is everywhere.' Last night, you remember, there was a man who did not look up when you passed his house, and when you spoke 'Howdo' to him, he would not answer. He was an obia man. He would not take the hand of a white man. I have heard the men say there are others who are not glad that the white man has come so far, and that the gods have allowed it. . . . "

Abruptly he stopped. He had said more than he intended.

"I came to tell you about another thing," he continued after a moment of embarrassment. "You should know about fio-fio."

[753] Fio-fio was a small brown bug, and it was also a spirit. The spirit fio-fio brought sickness and death to human beings. For people like ourselves, untutored in the ways of the spirits, and the things which allowed them to gain sway over an individual, only a diviner could seek out the incident which had caused fio-fio to come.

751
783 That was why it was necessary to bathe in a protecting fluid, to "wash fio-fio," even though we had not yet been stricken.

"Let me tell you how to wash fio-fio," he went on. "You must bathe when nobody sees you, and this is what you must have: the skin of a plantain we call the mother plantain that has been dried in smoke, and weeds which I will give you, and Negro-country pepper which I have with me, and seven pieces of chalk, and some eggshells. Some people put washing-blue in the water, too, but that you don't need. You can bathe in it early in the morning, or at noon, or right after sundown, but no one must see you."

He paused for a moment.

776
626
578 "Do you not have fio-fio in your country? Look, this is how it is. You quarrel with a man who works for you, and he comes back and says he is sorry, and you say you are

V

sorry, too. He does that because he is afraid of fio-fio. If a 776
man quarrels with you, and he keeps his anger in him, and 626
you keep yours, and later he takes work from you, then 578
either he, or you, or both of you will get sick. If the anger was great, then you or he or both of you will become very sick. If you catch it soon, then you get together, and, as we say, '*Pu' mofo'*—take back what you had said. Then you get better."

Fio-fio had nothing to do with enmity. Honest enmity was not harmful. Enmity masked, however, or bitterness, or a grudge which a man harbored while he continued a relationship of friendship, sickened a man, and it sickened the man against whom the grudge was held, as well. That was fio-fio. Only those who had relationships of intimacy were subject to it—people who were united by blood ties, or ties of friendship, or servants who formed part of the household.

The remedy was ceremonially to retract and ask for [783]
pardon. It had to be done before people, with the proper ritual and bathing.

"If this isn't done, then a person gets worse and worse, and dies. I myself saw the fio-fio bug fly out of the nose of a dying woman."

This woman had sickened because she had quarreled with her sister over a man. In the end they had both lost him. As time went on, they began to talk again and later lived together in their mother's house. But they had never forgiven each other. One day one of them borrowed a kerchief from the other to wear at a dance. The next day she was ill. From then on she got worse and worse.

"The quarrel between the sisters had happened so long ago that they never thought of it. So they did nothing. In a month she died, and I myself saw the fio-fio bug fly out of her nose."

He knew another story about fio-fio.

"This happened to a man I know. His child died less than a month ago. He was living with a woman, and the woman became big with child. He had been away in the

776 bush for some months, and when he came back he did not
626 feel well, and they quarreled often. When they quarreled she
578 refused to cook for him, and so he said bad things to her.
He began to say the child was not his. Now when a father
[774] takes away his 'kra, his soul, from the child while it is in
the mother's womb, it is not good. When the child was born, it was a very small child. Afterwards the man left the woman. He still said the child was not his, but he used to bring money to the woman sometimes to buy things for the child. The neighbors said she must not take the money. If she took it, they said, the child would die of fio-fio. But the woman took the money. Nowadays many of them don't believe in the old things, until they find out. When the child was four months old it died. Everybody knew it was fio-fio."

He told other incidents of what happened to people who had fio-fio.

"I tell you all this because sometimes the men in the boats talk about the whites, and they think you don't understand. But you know what they say, and you are angry. If you give them a present of leaf tobacco later, or rum, then they or you may become sick. . . . *The men in* the bush know what to do about fio-fio, Massa, and you
must learn, too. The proverb says: 'How is a boat to go,
[538] if it has no paddles?'"

3

137 At the entrance to the village of S'ei a gigantic silk-
cotton tree stood. Its trunk was massive, and the roots
which projected outwards like so many buttresses made
824 of it a great somber cathedral. The curiously twisted
grooves which these buttresses made were said to house
776 many spirits, and particularly the three who lived in the
kankan tree, as the natives called it. Gedeonsu, the male god, and Tinné, his wife, lived there with their child Dyombie, the most dreaded of them all. The kankan tree gods were thought of as women's gods, though a few men might be found, here and there, who would, on occasion,

be possessed by them. Between the roots of the tree offerings 824
were placed—two or three bottles on their sides, or a 776
calabash filled with sacred clay.

When the time came to dance to the gods of the 824
kankan tree, a tunic of cotton was placed about its trunk.
While the drums spoke to the gods, white clay was spread 796
over the bark, a chicken was killed, and its blood allowed 776
to spray the tree and drip into a calabash placed on the ground to receive it. Eggs inside obia pots were put beside the tree, and bottles filled with sweet liquor and the juice of sugar cane. All about its wide trunk the dancers swayed and leaped, each dancing to her own spirit until, at the height of their ecstasy, there were a few among them who would climb the great tree itself, and dance on its branches. The drums continued until the frenzy ebbed. Had they stopped sooner, those in the tree could not have remained there safely or in safety have descended to the ground.

At other times, women came to Gedeonsu to ask him for [842]
children, and those who were troubled by his spirit brought
offerings, though the great dances were held when the [789]
old year came to an end, and the big offerings were then *made.*

"If a man were to cut down a kankan tree, Gedeonsu
would cut off his foot. I myself saw it happen," said a man [688]
to us at S'ei. "And his sister got the god."

The kankan tree gods could be bought, too. A woman who [843]
wanted fertility would seek to buy Gedeonsu. Others might [432]
wish to have Tinné. Only an individual who had a spirit
which gave him the right to make obias and call the gods 791
could get the spirit for one who wished to buy it. Such a 824
man would take an obia pot, fill it with water and place 776
inside it cowrie shells which had not been cleansed. After 796
speaking his invocation, he would add a sacred white stone, called an obia stone, and with a calabash in one hand and a bell in the other, he would go to the tree and address the spirits as he rang the bell. When the water became ruffled, it was a sign that the god had entered it. Quickly he would cover the calabash with a cloth and take it away with him.

776 This ritual might have brought Gedeonsu, or Tinné—
776 whoever was called. The two could not, however, be taken
824 at the same time, for one of them had to be left to care for the child Dyombie. If two of the kankan tree gods were wanted, then mother and child, or father and child, would be sought.

824 776 "The kankan tree spirits are not bad, but people fear them. They are not as bad as the Akatasi gods."

The Akatasi gods were those which animated the kato liana, and were related to the gods of the ant hill. This kato bush was a terrible parasite which, getting its strangle hold on a tree, would rise higher than the tree itself and at last kill it.

The silk-cotton, however, was a friendly tree and cruel only when its spirits were tampered with by those who did not know how to control the gods. When the ancestors came into this river, which "in early days was only a creek," it was they who had sought out these trees, and had made their villages where they stood. Now the trees had become great, and the villages were great.

Here was the silk-cotton tree at S'ei, one of the greatest of all. Its roots made ridges in the path to the village. Under the spiritual guard they spread, and to the large oval of wood fixed on a wooden base which stood a short distance from it, and to the low shelter where, on the head of a crudely carved image, rested a whitened covered pot, and farther to the mound of earth on which stood offerings. Farther still the roots followed the path, and into the village itself, until, perhaps half a mile from the tree, they reached the Kromanti house and the village council house and the home of the chief. It was as though these roots were the arteries which fed strength to the Kromanti spirits dwelling there, and as if they brought the wisdom of the ancestors to the shelter where the men of the village gathered to hear and try cases, to discuss the will of men and gods as they touched upon the well-being of the people.

344 Upon our arrival we were bidden to the council house, where men and women were waiting about. This was an

open shelter, covered by a gabled thatch. At both sides the 344
eaves extended several feet from the posts which supported the roof, and almost touched the ground. The floor was of red clay, hardened and smooth. There were no stools about, and no other decorations. Men summoned to a council came with their own council benches. About two of the slender posts which faced the path were obias made of [778]
twined native sisal, of narrow strips of blue and red cotton, and cowrie shells. Each differed a little from the other, and each had its own potency, but what this was, none would say. On one of the crosspieces below the eaves were large balls of hardened red clay. They had been put there by the old women to await the time for molding the clay into the obia pots, which, after they had been fired, would be blackened with the soot of rice hulls and oil and refired.

Against the crossbeams in one corner of the council house the women had gathered, and at the other end the men were seated on their stools, with Captain And'u and the bassia, the man second in command, among them. While the men were discussing the Neng'e Nana, their Negro grandfathers from Africa, the women were addressing some direct questions to the white woman.

Why was she not smoking a pipe, as fitted the position 000
of a woman of rank who was on her way to visit the Granman? What had she done with her children when she went on this long journey which took twenty-one nights and days to reach the Suriname white man's city? Did she like her husband's other wife? Had she more children than the other wife? What rank would her sons inherit from their uncles?

"How many gods have you?" one of the younger women asked.

"I have four—three Vodu, and one Apuku," another 776
said, as though the question had been put to her, and she could say with pride that she had three snake gods, and one bush god.

The bassia's handsome wife, who had overheard the men 776
speak of the white man's book which showed pictures of 186
their ancestors, said, "The whites read out of books. The

776 gods do not come to them." There was in her voice con-
186 tempt for women who had no gods. She was of a reddish-
brown color, taller and more slender than most, and the
great coils of brass about her arms and ankles told that her
[301] beauty had had full recognition. These had come to her at
[585] marriage, as had the small earrings of gold which the bassia
had brought to her from French Guiana. With these, too,
had come cloths and handkerchiefs, beads and carvings.

609 If white women had no gods, did they know any of the
123 other things which women must know? Did the white
[291] woman wear an apron underneath all her cloths, as women
should? Were her thighs cicatrized? Did she cook for her
husband, or other men, when she should be isolated in
the special house provided for women's monthly visits?
[841] Did she purify herself with sacred clay when she emerged
from isolation in order not to spoil her husband's obias, for
which contact with a woman who has her menses is the
deadliest taboo? Why, having borne children, did her
figure not show it?

[534] "Have you drums?" the bassia's wife asked. "Without
drums, how do you pray? How do you dance?"

[535] Dancing without drums availed nothing.

"White women have no gods. The gods do not come to them. They are not troubled by the need to dance. White women do not pray," she concluded, seeing that what dancing the white woman did could only be a feeble affair.

"I will send my son to your country. The men who go to the French shore say it is good to know how to count the white man's way. My woman-child I will never send," she finished with finality.

Now it was the white woman's turn to ask a few questions, having done explaining how her boots laced, and why it was that she was dressed very much as her husband was dressed.

751 The white clay in the hair and on the face of a small
776 child was medicine. The child's mother had washed for her
183 god that morning. He was a god whose day for dancing was
Wednesday, and now, feeling the god stir in her, she would

wash every day until Wednesday came to permit her to 751
dance. When she washed with the sacred moistened clay, 776
she rubbed the white on her children. 783

"Will all the women dance on Wednesday who have the same god as you?"

The child's mother shook her head. "If the god comes to them, yes. If he doesn't come, they can't dance."

And the bassia's wife said, "The women who are in the 841
menstrual house can't dance. When they hear the drums, they are troubled, but they must remain quiet."

The woman had spoken too eagerly and too loudly, 593
for her husband, overhearing her, said something in a low rapid voice, and at once the women fell silent and several of them remembered errands they had to see to.

4

"When men are in the council house, you mustn't 576
interrupt," said the bassia's wife to the white woman. [593]
"If we did what you did just now, our husbands would scold us when they got home, and if we did it again, they would beat us."

She had taken upon herself all the prerogatives of friendship, and continually criticized the manners of her visitor.

The old were to be greeted last. A gift was to be received by another. When returning a piece of carving to another's hand, the carving should rest on the outstretched palm, while the elbow of that arm lay on the palm of the other hand. In the presence of men, a woman who took a stool should turn it about and sit on its narrower side.

"Never sit on the bare earth. The spirits don't like it," she said one instant, and the next, "Don't play with your fingers on top of your sun helmet. Your breasts will get [806]
long. Drumming is not a thing for women." [562]

There had been other warnings during earlier visits to Bush Negro villages, but none had borne down so heavily upon the shortcomings of the stranger.

834 848 "Don't go off into the bush with a man. A child born to you will have a bad bush god, if you do," she added as an afterthought.

5

123 177 In the other corner, Chief And'u, the bassia, and about half a dozen men were talking of the great book about their ancestors which the white man had.

"It is large so," said the chief to one of the older men, indicating an imaginary size which multiplied the size of the actual volume at least tenfold. "And people say it has in it pictures of the Apuku gods, small as we ourselves know them, and a picture of the evil Apuku who appear as fire in the distance. . . . Mati, white men have gone into the Kromanti houses in the country of our ancestors and have made pictures!"

"It is impossible!"

"I want to see!"

The old man said, "I will not look. Books are not for us, mati."

"But mati, the G'aman has heard, and he wants to see."

The old man shook his head. He would have nothing of pictures that figured what should never have been allowed to be photographed.

It seemed prudent to give the conversation a new turn. 137 Down river, the men had said that a man of this village had lately found a new *neku* liana. Was it so?

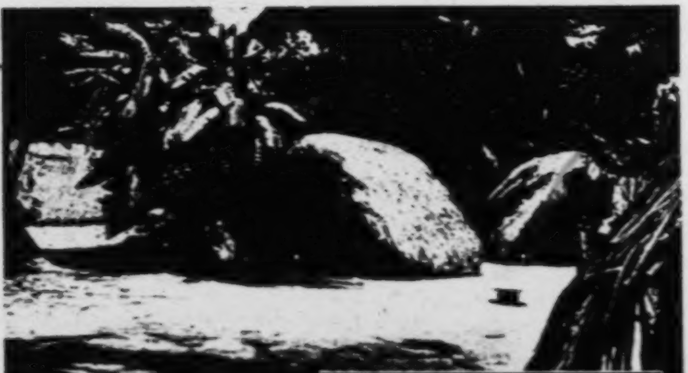
"The man who found it was my son," said the old man, "you should have come for the dance. You would have seen [802] how we do things here in the bush. But pictures you could not take. No, mati, if you photograph, you take the soul."

824 796 The festivities for the find had been especially joyful, he explained, for the boy had only recently come by his gods, and this had been yet another proof that he would serve his family capably. For though the find was his own, all [208] [226] his relatives in the mother's line would enjoy its use. Hereafter, when the poison of its leaves and its slender branches

was wanted for killing fish in a creek, they would have their own neku. 824 796

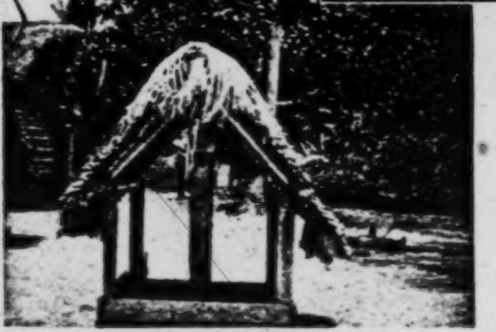
When a man found a neku vine, he first had to cut some of it, and bring it home with him. Then he sent word to all the men of his village to come and carry the branches of the neku to the place of ceremony. He named the place and day for the pounding of the neku. The invitation was given in the name of the old men of the village, and the headman sent his bassias, those men who assist him in village affairs, with messages to neighboring settlements. When this had been done, the finder of the vine appointed five or six men of his own choice, and these were called "Bassias of Neku." It was they who had charge of the ceremonies. The night preceding the dance these men went about crying, "Tomorrow we will have neku. All must come." Again the men went to the bush where the neku vine had been found, and brought to the village some more of the vine for pounding. [178] [226]

Early the following morning a horn was sounded, and the men from the neighboring villages who had come for the festivities also went and cut some of the neku, and brought it to the pounding place. When the men were gathered, each took up a stick and pounded the neku. And what they crushed they put into corials filled with water. These corials were then sunk in the stream. In a short time the poisoned fish floated to the surface of the water, and all the men took up their long-handled scoops and began to fish. The bassias of neku, whom the finder of the plant had appointed for the ceremony, directed the fishing. When a quantity of fish had been caught, those who were not of the village where the owner of the vine lived gave of their catch to the finder of the neku plant, and some went to the chief of the village, and the elders, too, had a share of what the outsiders had caught, though in some villages only the owner of the vine profited by the gifts of the others. Then the men joined the women, who were dressed in their finest cloths, and the dancing began. 824 796 226 [178]



Shrine of the Apuku gods.

Kromanti
Mama.



Village guardians.

[Facing P. 158]

824 796 Later, through the gathering darkness, the people of the neighboring villages went home, paddling their boats which were loaded down with the fish that had been netted. And from this time on, everyone knew that this neku vine was [403] [428] the property of him who had found it, and of his family, down through his mother's line, forever.

"Ai, mati, you would have seen something, if you had got here for the neku dance!"

6

361 Like any other Bush Negro village, S'ei was a series of sandy clearings about which were grouped huts of woven palm fronds and palm thatch. All about was the big bush. [487] [789] The trails which led from the village were each guarded by a magically treated palm azang, and shrines to the ancestral spirits who saw to it that evil was kept away. Where the several paths led, a stranger was not encouraged to discover. Down one, women were to be seen disappearing [862] in the morning with trays on their heads, their infants astride their backs, held inside the folds of a cloth which was fastened high above their breasts, and caught up again below them. In many upper river villages, this path led to the fields, some distance away. Others were the way to [778] shrines, erected to those spirits which must be worshiped outside the village. Another path might lead to a brook, which the villagers held sacred. There were trails, too, which connected neighboring villages, and led perhaps farther yet, but for the stranger, the highway was the river, [486] and no matter how short the distance between one settlement and another, he was not invited to make his way through the bush.

"You do not want to go through the bush, white man. In the bush are evil spirits," we heard many times.

A village clearing was divided into quarters. Each quarter was inhabited by one of the *mbe*, or extended families, and 361 592 the quarter bore its name. It was composed of several households—five or six or more, depending upon the size of the village. A household was not confined to one building only, but few who were not men of rank and means had more than three. One was for the woman and her children, another for storing the crops, and the third was the man's treasure house, where women might not come. It was like the matter of wives. Only men of position could afford more than one. But if a man had two wives and both lived in his village, then perhaps five huts would bear a design identified with him on the carved side posts which outlined the low doorway. This design would recur in the various carvings he had made for his women—it was his crest. And though a man from another village, who was not related to him, might like it, and liking it copy it, this practice would be socially frowned upon. 361 592 [554] [595] [531] [423]

A village quarter, however, did not contain only dwelling places, and storehouses, and men's treasure house. Certain families also had in their part of the village an enclosed shrine for the family gods. If in a given family a powerful Vodu, or snake god, had come to an ancestress and had in a dream, or in a seizure, or through a revelation made to an obia man, chosen her as his *'asi*—his priestess or medium—then with this disclosure came the instructions for the place of locating a house of worship to that Vodu, and the type of house it was to be. Such a shrine, once erected, would be kept in the quarter, and worshiped by the members of that family. Sometimes in front of a dwelling hut, a low enclosure, the size of a small kennel, would stand a little to the side of the door. This was a house to Tonê the river spirit. In one such house lived a woman who had a great Tonê god. She had the gift of prophecy. When the men gathered for a council meeting in the village of the Granman, then she, too, would sometimes be bidden to come and sit with the men, though, being a woman, she could never speak at council meetings. 361 778 [791] [562]

"Touch her skin," the other women said, pointing out this albino woman, "and you will have your desires fulfilled." [826]

In each quarter, too, there was an open house where the women did their cooking, and perhaps a platform or two, 343 251

1:Herskovits & Herskovits E-5 (1928-1929) 1934

SR8 Bush Negroes SR8

Saramacca

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343 251 where, in the proper season, maripa nuts and rice were dried.

361 778 One quarter differed very little from another, except that in one there might grow the plant which yielded the red and black beans used for the sacred rattles, and for playing the game of adji, which entertained the spirit of the dead while the body lay in state. Instead of a house to the family gods, there might be found a mound of earth in front of one doorway, with an axe-head lying upon it as a shrine for a man's spirit, or a low forked stick sunk into the ground, holding a pot with water and weeds in it for the curing powers of its obia.

361 344 A village of any size had also a quarter in which stood the communal buildings. The council house which might also serve on occasion as the house for the dead was there. The menstrual house for the women, a small building which was recognized by a broken calabash, or a porcelain pot brought from the white man's city, lying outside the entrance, stood a little to the side. The Kromanti house, and perhaps an enclosed shelter for the bush gods who shared the shrine with the snake deities, was also located somewhere near the open communal shrine. A village wherein lived the clan 361 346 [614] 769 782 head contained in addition a house for the ancestral spirits of the clan. This was called a *Fa'aka-pau wosu*, literally a flagpole house, a euphemism for the shrine to the ancestors for whom white cotton wa[illegible]t up on sticks. In this Fa'aka-pau wosu prayers were offered up for all the important ventures of the clan, and in time of stress a priest would come there with sacrifices, to bid one of the ancestors to enter his body and give him sight. When seizure came on, such a priest prophesied. Sometimes the ancestors were consulted in the same manner as that in which the will of the dead was ascertained. Men would take up a sacred plank and carry it in a state of possession; the elders would put questions to the ancestor who had been called. The [787] answers were construed as favorable or unfavorable according to the way the plank tipped.

A NIGHT AT S'EI

As we made a tour of the village, we discussed all this 778
with the chief and his bassia, and with the other men who 776
accompanied us. When we reached the open place sacred to the great gods, we stopped. The shrine was a fenced-in space, perhaps eight or nine feet long and almost as wide. Inside was a slender pole, with a head carved on its top, and a cotton tunic about its middle, and this was the wife of the Great God, the chief said. The ladder with the platform on it, on which stood a bottle, was the shrine of the great Sky God. At the base of the image with the tunic were several bottles, some white clay, and a few empty glasses, and everywhere were sticks with cloth on them, many with the cloth in tatters. Where the cotton had altogether rotted away, the stick alone remained.

"Let us go in," said the chief to the men.

With the chief came a young man whose hair was braided, 791
and who wore several obias on neck and arms. He was [302]
training to become an obia man. The bassia signaled us to follow, but the others remained outside.

The young man took up a bottle and poured some of its 782
contents into an earthen jar, and from the jar he poured out a libation to the Earth Mother. The captain prayed, explaining that we were white people on our way to the Granman, that he was leaving in the morning to notify the Granman of our approach. Would the gods take him and us in safety, and would they see to it that all we saw should be seen with the eyes of friendship? Then he prayed for a child in the village who was ill, and for his people, and for the clan of the Granman, the Matchau lo, and for his own family. After each prayer he paused, and those outside the paling clapped their hands and sang out, "Great thanks."

Before the chief's prayer was finished, an old man came [411]
by with a bush knife in his belt, and his gun. He was just then returning from the hunt, and he stopped to thank the great gods for the kill he had made. He spoke in a whisper, but his intonation was as conversational as the chief's had been.

782 "Tonight there will be dancing for you," And'u said, when we left the shrine. "I will go and pray again before the dance, and then I will go to my hammock early, for I leave at sunrise. We will meet again at the G'aman's."

The bassia's wife followed us to our house.

[562] "You are a woman, yet you went inside the shrine. Maybe you do have gods, white woman. When you go in again will you pray to the Earth Mother for the woman Kupà, who is my sister? Twice she bore girl children, and both [842] sleep. Now she is with child again. She wears many obias about her neck, and daily she washes with white clay. She is the woman with the wooden obia doll hanging between her breasts. No, not the one who has the small black sack about her neck. Any woman who is with child wears that. You will know her when you see her. She is beautiful."

7

535 The dance was held in the bassia's quarter, in front of one of his houses. The bassia was a man of wealth. He had three wives, while the chief had but two. Whether one of the three was only nominally his wife and had come to him at the death of a brother, we were unable to learn, but that [342] his means were large was apparent. The house where his personal possessions were stored was built high on posts. A house so raised stood out from those about it and bore the same name as the moon. Underneath it, in the shelter made by the posts, lay a partly made drum, some carved wooden implements, and carpenter's tools. There was also a forked stick in the ground upon which rested a black obia pot with water and weeds in it.

535 The children began the dancing.

533 *Ayo, ayo*
Ayo, ayei,
[539] *Agida comes,*
Ayo, ayo,
Earth spirits come,
Ayo, ayei.

A NIGHT AT S'EI

A girl of ten or eleven led the chorus. She had a string 535
about her waist, and the strip of cloth that was tied about 533
her neck as a ceremonial garment hung down cape fashion.
About her navel and on her face the cicatrized patterns
had been completed. Her voice was the shrill voice of a
child, and the answering chorus was as shrill.

"Chaka, chaka!" called the bassia who was directing 535
the dance. He was demanding those movements which
bring into play the muscles of the hips.

The women waited. They had come in all their finery,
their tunics of the newest cloth, their coils of brass bracelets [301]
and anklets made to gleam by rubbing with sand, their
skins dark and glistening with the oil rubbed into them for [302]
the ceremonial occasion. Those whose hair was worn in
braids had redressed it that day. About their necks were
beads. Their cloths were fastened tightly about them, so
that their figures showed plainly.

The men, also in their best, waited with them. The iron 535
Kromanti obias on their upper arms fitted tightly, and 789
showed the great muscles above and below them. Those
who wore beads had two or three strands of yellow and
red intertwined, the small beads worn by men, small almost [301]
as okra seeds. One or two wore love obias—cowrie shells [832]
sewed on a band of white cotton, and then dipped into
water which was thickened with white clay. One or two
wore a small black bell-shaped obia—half the size of their
thumbs—on a black string, and with swagger had swung it
about so that it hung at the back. There were obias below
the knee, and obias which were great brass rings for the
big toe of the right foot. But one or two of the old men,
and the young man who was in training for an obia man,
wore a jaguar tooth on a string of native twining.

Drums . . . drums. Would there be drums? 535

The word was whispered from one to the other, and
passed like a wave over the waiting figures.

But there would be no drums. This was the day when [776]
two gods might come. The god of the ant hill, for which
men and women might dance, and the buzzard god of the
men's Kromanti society.

535 men's Kromanti society. The elders had decided these dances were too violent to show to the white man who was with them for the night. Whatever of the esoteric the white man was to see was for the Granman himself to decide. To introduce the drums for the secular dances, and the half-sacred awasa, would be dangerous, for once the drums were there, and the spirit seized one of the players, he would begin to call the gods. When the gods came the dancing would take place until the spirits were satisfied.

"There will be no drums," said the bassia aloud. "There is no one to play them."

No drums!

Again the whispering began. The eagerness, the energy which had seemed to float in the darkness from one to another of the waiting figures began to be dissipated. The men and women still waited, but they were listless.

[533] [539] The little girl sang,

"*The kogbwa drum*
Sounds Toné."

And the chorus sang,

"*Give us Toné.*"

The bassia who was master of ceremonies noticed the loss of interest with displeasure. It had not been the intention of the elders, when they had made this decision, to have it interfere with the reception of the strangers. He had counted on having spirited secular dancing.

"Friend," he said to the young white man, "get the dancing started."

He turned again and again to the young man who was being disciplined in the way of the gods, exhorting him to beat time faster, to sing louder. And to the women he shouted, "Shake, women, shake—*chaka!*"

The dancing grew lively.

The white man had learned the words of the refrain, and [023] was singing with them. Master Nigger! here was a white man who could sing their songs. The white woman had been shown by the bassia's wife how to clap her hands to the rhythm of the song, and now she could not stop for an instant, though her hands ached. 535 [123]

"*Batu man*—Clap your hands!" the bassia's wife called to her, the instant her visitor's zeal slackened. She herself was dancing in place, her infant on her back, sound asleep.

"*Chaka*—Shake!" she too began to shout, and once she was so carried away by her hand clapping that she joined the dancers, and danced facing the obia man.

Tall and slender as she was, she crouched opposite the man, her child on her back, and executed the most amazing steps. It was as though every muscle in her body had been set in motion by some invisible dynamo.

An old woman interrupted them. She stepped into the circle, and put her arm about the bassia's wife. "Adoo!" she crooned, and brought her to her feet. Another woman had done the same for the obia man.

Now one of the men who wore both a love obia and a brass ring on his great toe began a song. The melody was only a variant of the one Bayo had sung and the seketi songs we had heard at Gankwe and elsewhere. But here the recitative of the leader was longer. What he sang was not unlike one of our own ballads. He recounted the experiences of a young Saramacca man on the Marowyne River. He had met a Djuka woman, who had taken up with him for his money, and in the end she had exposed him to her people. 533 [132]

Another man sang of a war that white men had with each other. Hard times came to the Saramacca people. There was no work. Then their Granman sent a message to the white elders. The Granman told them people should live in peace together.

The bassia had no need now to spur on the dancers. The small open space was a heaving mass. Nothing seemed immobile. The stars darted, the lights of the small oil lamps held by the bystanders flickered, the very posts which held the thatch of the houses in place and ended some feet 535 533

535 above the roof, like great horns, appeared to sway now to
533 one side, now to the other.

The hand clapping grew louder and faster, and faster still. The rhythm changed. Now the dancers were in pairs, feet interlocking and raised from the ground, while they danced each on one foot. It was one form of the *banya* dance. This was what was danced to the ancestors before the opening of sacred dances.

The bassia stirred uneasily and soon sought out the young obia man who was standing by. They whispered together for a few moments, and then the bassia spoke aloud.

"It is late, friends. Day will soon be coming. Let us end the dancing. Let us go to our houses."

He turned and whispered to his wife, who came forward with a smoking oil lamp in her hand. Like a knife she thrust herself straight between the pairs of interlocked figures, and began singing a slow moving song.

[539]
It is late,
Soon night will meet day,
Let us go to our hammocks,
Let us go to our homes,
Let the gods go to their homes.

In and out she went, separating the rows of figures, and her beautiful voice cast a spell over the dancers. With feet fixed, they stood poised to go on with their dance, yet did not move. The hand clapping stopped, and the singing. There was but the voice of the bassia's wife, who cut her way through the massed body of dancers, her sleeping child on her back, her oil lamp held before her, as she walked, arm outstretched. The dancers gave way before the flame in the small lamp, but still they stood there, their faces disturbed. It was as though food had been brought to whet their appetites and was as quickly snatched away.

At last a dancer reached for a lamp which was held by an old woman, and then another woman reached for hers.

A NIGHT AT S'EI

" . . . *It is late,* 533
Soon night will meet day . . . " 535 [537]

they chanted, as others joined them. Dancing to the slow rhythm of the singers, lamps in hand, all took up the song, until the bassia's wife led the way down the path. In a few moments the flicker of the oil lamps radiated in many [35A] directions, and the quieted dancers followed by their families went home singing.

Chapter X

AT THE COURT OF THE GRANMAN

1

000 "AT BREAK of day I start for the country of the Granman. I will see you there tomorrow, about the time day meets night," And'u, chief of S'ei, had said as he left the shrine to the Great Gods. Yet it was a full day later that we next saw And'u, for the speed at which two men could send a small corial upstream was not that at which our heavily loaded boats traveled. As the first day wore on and the succeeding one brought us closer and closer to our destination, it was evident that the news of the approach of the strangers had spread.

123 Report said that the white man had not come to bring his gods to them. He was not buying timber, he sought for no rubber trees, he was not here to tell them to grow new crops or to work gold. There were, in the white man's country, people who wanted to learn how other people lived. In the white man's country there were people who believed that men brought from the country of the great Negro ancestors had become Indians, or whites.

Master Nigger! They, the Saramacca people, become Ingi or Bak'a!

But why did people go about learning how others lived—Indians, and coolies who were brought to work the white man's plantations when their ancestors had won their freedom, and Negroes? Did white men grow rich doing this? Would this white man put their carvings in the big

house he told of, beside carvings of their Negro ancestors, 123
and then ask money from people who came to see?

Ambe! Was that what white people did to come into money?

From the provision grounds canoes filled with women 123
would dart toward us, and Bayo would call to us, as the 609
women cried their greetings, "Stand up, both of you. The women want to look at you."

The women's requests were, apparently, not to be ignored. Hurriedly we would climb out from inside the tent and balance ourselves on our knees over the tarpaulin-covered load in front of the boat.

"Look! Look! . . . . There are two men! It is not true that the white man brought his woman!"

Like a master showman, Bayo would stand there in the bow, his pole-stick poised for the next stroke, all his teeth showing.

"Take off your sun helmet, white woman," he would then say.

"Mother of all Negroes!"

"By Ando!"

"Her hair is yellow! She belongs to the river gods!"

"Is it that way they live in the white man's country? Do they not know the difference between men and women, that they both dress alike?"

Again Bayo had a ready answer.

"A white woman who travels in the bush dresses like a man. So they do in the white man's land."

"Master Nigger! Men and women wearing the same clothes!"

When Bayo decided that the women's curiosity had been satisfied, he would say his goodbyes to them with a flourish and, bearing down on the top of his pole-stick, would push away.

Soon we would hear Bayo's summons again.

"Come out. People want to see you."

This time there would be both men and women in the boats which had come circling about us, and the questions, exclamations, and Bayo's replies were heard afresh.

175 Now we were in the true, true Saramacca country, the land which the Bush Negro feels to be entirely his own. White men, it is true, had been here before, but only a handful, and the gods of the river, who were powerful, saw to it that of these not many got back to the white man's land. True, true Saramacca country! Every Bush Negro we met on the lower river spoke of it with the deepest feeling.

"It is all right here," one man after another had said, "but wait until you see the upper river, the true-true Saramacca!"

It was here that the first Bush Negro villages had been built, though this seemed fabulous to the strangers who, in strong boats, guided by men who were wise in the moods and courses of the river, had had nine days of hard travel on the way. The lower-river villages began to appear only after peace had been declared and had proved lasting. Eighty-six years ago men from the upper river who lived beyond the Granman's own village, in the Grand Rio, had come down and built the village of Gansee, which was some four hours' paddling upstream from the railhead.

We spoke of this to Bibifo, who himself was born in this country.

"You may well wonder, white man."

361
103 Here was no danger of having to wrest a camp from the bush at night, when the short tropical dusk came to overtake the traveler. Villages followed close, one upon the other. Here was Ma'lobbi, where the beauty of the wood [302] carver's art had made us linger beyond the time allotted to us for making the journey from S'ei to Asindopo Lantiwe. Here was Hei Kununu—High Mountain—which rose on a [133] steep slope above the river, and was pleasant to see after the long stretches of flat plain that lay below. Semoisi, noted for its riches, was there, and Pempeh, bearing a name well known in the Ashanti country in Africa. Here villages 203 were so close to each other that they could announce our approach on the talking drums.

"What is it we hear, Bayo?" we would ask.

"They are cutting down trees, Bak'a."

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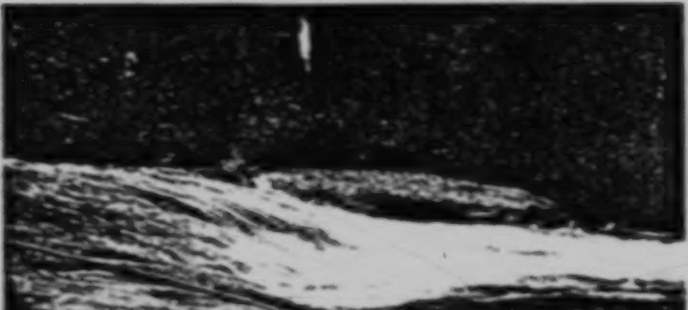
501
291

"In the true, true Saramacca . . ."

342
765

House of one recently dead.



133

The approach to the Tapa Wata falls.

[p. 170 (A)]

[Facing page 170]

203 We would proceed a short distance, and we would ask again, "Aren't those drums speaking?"

"Women are pounding rice."

But when we had asked the third time, he remained silent for a while, straining for the sound as though he could barely distinguish it. "Ya-hai, it's the apinti talking."

502 Some distance from Godo, which is situated just below the Tapa Wata falls, a small boat came up to us, paddled by one man. Bibifo whispered to us that this was Sungi, the head of the Kasito clan, and we knew that we were somewhere in the vicinity of the sacred village of Dahomey. He had come to pilot our boats into the Pikien Rio, he explained, after the greetings were over.

"Farther ahead others will come to help your boats up the rapids. I am here to show you the best course through this rough water. The G'aman has sent me to you. He awaits you."

"Bayo," we said, when Chief Sungi had left us to head up our little flotilla, "show us the landing place of Dahomey when we pass it."

778 We knew that we could not set foot in Dahomey, for it is the seat of the Bush Negro's most potent magic. Whether there is that in the village which the white man may not see, or whether, as we had been told, the natives do not wish to tempt the fates by bringing there those who would be doomed by the magic which kills the white man if he but treads on its earth, no one could say. But we had been warned that it would be of no avail to ask to be taken to Dahomey.

"Did you hear us, Bayo?"

"Ai!"

When we spoke to him again about the Dahomey landing place, however, he showed great astonishment. He had pointed it out to us, he said. How was it that we now asked about it again?

"It must be that it was with you like it was with the other white man who wanted to see Dahomey," he said.

778 797 The other white man was the Catholic missionary who for years had been living in the Gran Rio. He was a friend of the Saramacca people, and they liked him. Now this white man wanted to see Dahomey. He said that he, too, had a strong God who protected him. He asked so many times that they at last promised to take him there. But when he got to Pempeh he fell asleep, and he slept till . . . till they reached the Granman's country. So his life was saved. The gods, knowing that he was a friend of the Saramacca people, did not want to kill him. They put him to sleep until Dahomey was well out of reach.

"And this is what happened to you, Bak'a. The gods did not want to hurt you, so you did not see."

2

133 [361] Past these rapids and another stretch of rough water, and then before us lay the highest falls of the Saramacca. To the right, over a ledge of rock spreading in an unbroken sweep across its entire width poured the Gran Rio, the river up which lay the villages of the Loango clan, and beyond, the untrodden jungle which barricaded the way to the country of the Indians, and the basin of the Amazon. To the left was the final bit of fast water that remained between us and the village where the Granman awaited us. We were at last in the Pikien Rio.

[974] Here the stream narrowed, and we could see on both banks the people who were waiting to see us pass. The gay colors of the women's cloths were brilliant against the background of green, and their hallooing reached our ears above the rush of the water. A canoe with several young men came alongside.

"We are here to help you with your boats. We have been sent by the Granman. Fire three shots to let him know you are in the Pikien Rio."

576 [201] We fired, and instantly there was an answering salute of three guns. With the reinforcement of paddlers, it did not take long to reach the island which separated us from the landing place of Asindopo Lantiwe. Here all strangers

stopped to change their clothes, and make themselves fit 576
for the reception by the Granman.

We had been warned that these preparations were not to 576
be slighted. Those who had been to the village of the Gran- 609
man told many stories of the impressiveness of the ceremonial life, and the dignity of those who were there. It was the seat of government, the home of a potentate. A visitor, whether a village chief or a man from the city, had to keep in mind that he was to appear at court. Etiquette demanded that the traveler, once arrived at the island which now hid us from the Granman and his assembled villagers, debark, remove the stains of hard traveling, and dress in a manner befitting the reception which awaited him.

But the gods had planned otherwise.

At this time of the year, though the heavy rains were 132
over and the showers were becoming less and less frequent, it did sometimes happen that the clouds gathered at midafternoon and rain fell. To the northeast, behind us, we had seen the clouds massing, and now they hung low and glowering.

"It will rain," Sedefo called to us, just as we were making ready to see to a change of clothes, and an instant later the storm broke. With a kind of hurricane force which sent the branches toward the earth, and flares of lightning and crashes of thunder, the deluge was upon us. Not since our first days in the bush had we coped with a rain like this. The water poured down as though some giant hands were turning over endless vessels. Our tent seemed to have been taken as unaware as we were, for having sheltered us in many hard storms, it was now inadequate to keep out the downpour. We drew our raincoats tighter about us to keep off the water which came through the thatch.

Under the trees of the island the Bush Negroes were 123
huddled. Their favorite top cloths were still in their baskets, safe out of the wet under the white man's tarpaulins. No chance now to put them on, or to use the oil [302]
which they had jealously saved for making their faces and

123 [302] shoulders and arms glisten, or otherwise to make themselves presentable for the reception. There was nothing to do but to keep close to a tree-trunk, water dripping from naked body and the strip of twisted loin cloth, teeth chattering in the sudden chill brought on by the storm.

The head of Sungi was suddenly thrust inside our boat-tent.

"I saw the Granman. He says the storm is passing. You are to come to him as you are. It is best so. Waiting here is cold."

Turning, he ordered the paddlers to their places, and almost before the paddles were in motion, the guns began to fire.

"The Granman knows the time it takes to give a message. The Granman knows everything," said Bayo in great [203] admiration, as the guns saluted.

Three shots, and three more. Two shots, an interval, and another coming faintly. Then a short silence, and once more the guns, in clusters of three, but now sounding from several directions.

As we rounded the bend of the island the farther bank was alive with people. The rain had subsided to a drizzle. Across the strip of water which separated us from the shore we could see men and women and children standing about, the women with large food trays inverted over their heads to protect their finery. But the men, disdaining such aids, stood in the rain and looked on with undisguised curiosity. Boats joined ours from up and down the river. With the sound of the guns came hallooing, shrill cries which were the women's expression of enthusiasm, actual or ceremonial.

292 554 622 As we watched, several figures appeared on the high bank, the others making way for them. Two of the men were not dressed in the colored toga-like cloths that were worn by the others, but in coats of rich material which reached to their knees. They wore black top-hats with cockades at the side. One of these, we recognized as Chief And'u of S'ei. His coat was of deep crimson, bordered in blue, and his companion's a vivid yellow. Both of these men carried

Both of these men carried
long wands of office, of black wood topped with silver knobs. About their necks were heavy silver chains, and from each chain was suspended a large silver crescent. 292 554 622 [293]

Another man stood near them to one side. He wore a long coat of white edged with scarlet and blue. He carried no stick, and wore no insignia. On his head, over a white kerchief wound tightly about the head and caught up in the back, was a white sun helmet. Above his head, held by one of the younger men who accompanied him, was an umbrella, the highest emblem of rank. It betokened that this man was Moana Yankuso, Granman of the Saramacca people. 554 643

3

Kasanya was first out of the boat when the dugouts were brought to shore, and after him came Bibifo. Sedefo and Asikanu remained with the younger men, waiting for the Granman to indicate that he wished to receive them. Only men of rank and elderly members of his own clan would go at this time to speak to the headman, who stood there watching the boats. 622 574 576 [554]

"We came, G'aman," we heard Kasanya say, "and we brought the Bak'a." Two or three low-voiced sentences followed, and then the conversation was terminated by the elderly functionary in the yellow coat, who came down to our boat.

"I greet you in the name of the G'aman, Bak'a," he announced. "The G'aman himself awaits you. Come with me."

As we stepped out of the boat, the hallooing of the women and the shouts of the children, which had stopped when the paddlers addressed the Granman, began once again, and, as an underlying voice, the salutes from the shotgun were to be heard. The old man, shifting his wand of office to his left hand, now carefully helped first the one, then the other out of the boat and, offering his arm to each in turn, led us to the top of the steep rise, until we were face to face with the Granman. It would have been unlucky had we lost our footing at this moment of welcome. This chieftain was 574 576 609 643

574 there not only to tender the courtesy due the guests of the
576 tribal head, but to see that no such mishap occurred to
609 them.

643 When we had both gained the ascent, he turned to the Granman.

"Headman Yankuso, the Bak'a is before you."

As though just become aware of us, Yankuso fixed us with his eyes, fastening his glance on each in turn.

"Odi, white man. White woman, odi!"

A great figure of a man he was, as he stood there. Tall and massive of build, he towered over those who surrounded
[291] him. Barefooted like the rest, there was that in his bearing which was the way of a man who was accustomed to obedience, whose word was final. He was pure Negro. His skin was dark. In his features there was no hint that the lineage of this ruler held any of the blood of the white masters, nor that his ancestors numbered among them Indians who had given way before his invading forbears. His face was impassive, yet underneath the outward immobility was an alertness which the glistening, oil-anointed skin made the more alive. His speech was measured, his words articulated with studied emphasis, which gave to each of them the value of a completed image.

"*Bari*—Cry out!" he called to the women in his vibrant voice. "Halloo, give the welcome of the bush to the people who came."

Amid the renewed cries which his command brought, we turned from the river bank and walked slowly up the path toward the village, past the silk-cotton tree, past the shrine to the ancestors, until we reached an open place on which fronted half a dozen thatched buildings.

"This is my house, white man," he said, pointing to it. "I will put you near me. I will put you in the council house."

4

344 The council house at Asindopo Lantiwe—the village of Asin, the seat of government—was unlike any we had seen.

Two of its walls were of the plaited palm fronds which were entwined into so pleasant a pattern on the houses of the Bush Negroes. The side walls, however, were carpentered of slats which formed a paling, and over this the slanting roof hung. Through the spaces between the slats we could see the brown feet of the passing villagers, an occasional flare of a gay tunic, or a corner of a man's cloth. Occasionally the big eyes of a child who had wandered over to the paling peered through, to see what was happening inside. Through the slats of the wall nearest to the Granman's house we saw tall earthen jars resting on a plank. There were perhaps four of them, all of varying sizes, and these held creek and river water to which the magic properties of weeds and incantations had been added. 344 353 [815]

The purposes of these slats were manifold. Not everyone could sit within the council house when the tribal chiefs gathered. Only those whose rank qualified them appeared inside when court was held. But to those sitting quietly outside those palings which formed the side walls of the house, what was spoken inside was clearly audible, and it was thus that many listened for the decisions which they awaited. Then, too, since this was an enclosed council house and when the door was open a plaid cloth hung over the doorway to insure privacy, the only light which penetrated came through these openings in the side walls. The eaves hung low, barring much of the light that might have come through the palings, and this allowed but the grayest flicker even at midday and brought into the council house the atmosphere which symbolized to them the cool of morning. The word "cool" was their image for peace, and health, and fairness, and deliberation, and justice. Inside the council house, then, was a light which "cooled the heart," for heart and head are synonymous to the Bush Negro when he speaks of emotional states. 344 623 [554] [827]

It was not a large house, and it appeared smaller because of the many furnishings that were in it. Against the wall facing the door a number of magnificently carved benches lay on their sides, one on top of the other, there obviously 344 352

344 to be admired for their artistry, but there also for ceremo-
352 nial purposes which were never divulged. When one of
these benches was later taken down to show the magic of
paper which, placed on the top of a carving and rubbed with
black crayon, reproduced the design beneath, the Granman
looked startled, and then ordered that it be replaced.
Nor were other rubbings allowed.

531 On both sides of these massed benches were many objects
352 which could barely be distinguished in the half dark-
ness of the house. There were guns and canisters, there
were a few native brooms, and several wrapped parcels.
[534] There was also an apinti drum on which the gods were
[778] addressed. Not even at Ma'lobbi, where the chief, a famous
carver, showed us many remarkable products of his art,
did we see designs worked with the fine, sure lines or the
beauty of individual motifs such as were traced on this
apinti. The carving was in relief and covered the entire
surface of the drum, which stood about three feet high,
curving outwards from the top, and resting on a narrow
circular base which raised its body about six inches from the
ground. It was covered with a deerskin that use and
exposure to the atmosphere had stained unevenly to shades
of amber.

344 Facing these carvings was the door which, itself of
778 wood, swung on wooden hinges of native fashioning. In
532 relief appeared the Earth Mother, and surrounding her
were the symbols of fertility. No man, not even the Granman
[645] himself, dared speak her name in this council house. At
trials, when oaths were taken, she might be appealed to,
but to call her idly would bring down her wrath on the
Granman's clan, and, perhaps not stopping there, since
the council house was of all the clans, she would revenge
herself upon all the people of the Saramacca River. The
carving was more beautiful than on the apinti which stood
against the opposite wall. The greatest artist on the river
had made it.

"That man had the gods, ya-hai," the men said, when we talked of the Granman's carvings.

Above the door was a shelf which did not quite reach 344
the entire width of the wall, and on this shelf were the 354
council benches, which the Granman supplied to the visiting chiefs. These benches were small, low, and as little
ornamented with carvings as the work stools used by the [532]
women. But on the sides symbols were incised, and at least two of them we were able to identify as clan emblems. One of these had the conventionalized patterning of the hatchet, the emblem of the Granman's clan, and another a flower which is associated with the people from whose group come the principal diviners. The tops of these simple stools sometimes had inlays of dark wood, but whether their outlines were of ritualistic importance or not, no one would say.

From the beams hung several umbrellas, still inside the 344
wrappings in which they had come from the white man's 353
city, and a wickless metal lamp, into whose chains envelopes were inserted. These envelopes contained letters
received by the Granman which awaited the coming of the 344
missionary to be read, or letters which had already been 354
read, and were there to add color to the official scene. 179

There were also other *Bakra sani*—white man's things—in the house. A canvas folding chair which filled almost an entire wall stood against the slats beside which, on the
outside, were the earthen jars. This was for the Granman. 643
He sat in it with the majesty of an emperor. No one ever approached it too closely, and we were never invited to take our ease in it when the Granman was in his own house.

In addition, there was a table in the center of the room,
covered with a red and black plaid cloth from the city, and [352]
two straight-back chairs. On the table stood an alarm clock which was set for the noncommittal hour of twelve and a glass decanter filled with rum.

Chief And'u was the first to join us inside.

"It is fine here at the G'aman's." 622

"Yes, it is a fine house. And you, And'u, you look well in 842
your coat. Is it when you are with the Granman that you dress so?"

622 "It is the coat of a chief. All chiefs wear these coats
292 At the G'aman's we wear the best we have."

[293] We looked at his silver-topped wand of office. "Do all chiefs carry these?" we asked.

"Not every chief has a stick like mine. And all chiefs do not have one of these." He pointed to the crescent of silver which hung from a chain about his neck.

"It is beautiful."

"Ya-hai. And it's old."

Embossed on the silver plaque were the arms of Holland, richly worked.

622 "After the time of running away, when the fighting was
648 over between our ancestors and the whites, these were given
293 to us, and the wands of office. But not all chiefs have their
643 wands from the white man. Some have the ones we call 'free sticks.' A man who has a 'free stick' is not a chief for the white man, but we know that he is a chief."

He added that the whites had made an agreement with the escaped Negroes that if they would no longer raid the plantations and carry away slaves with them they would be considered free men in their bush, under the white man's government. Since that time the Bush Negro Granman and certain of the village chiefs had had official recognition, and as a token of this each of them had been given a uniform, a
[292] high hat, a crescent with the arms of Holland worked on it, a silver-headed staff, and an annual stipend.

"The chiefs who have 'free sticks,' the white man does not pay."

576 As we spoke of these things, we were interrupted from time to time by the noiseless brushing aside of the cloth which hung above the door, and the entrance of one of our men, or a man of the Granman's village, who brought in our canisters and hammocks. With not even a glance in our direction, they would leave as noiselessly and return to the river. Through the slatted side walls we could hear the sounds of such activity as we had not thought possible in the tropics.

5

Outside the doorway we heard a decisive clearing of the 574
throat, louder than the coughs we had already learned to 576
associate with the approach of a visitor. After a short 609
pause, the Granman's bulk filled the low entrance, and with him came the elder in the yellow coat, followed by Sungi of Dahomey, the chief who had come to pilot us to the village of the Granman, and the bassia from S'ei.

The men stood with ceremonially inclined bodies until the Granman was settled in his chair, then each in turn took a bench from the shelf above the door, and still with body bent found a place for it against the wall facing the Granman.

After a silence, the Granman spoke.

"The unloading is done. I have set aside five houses for the Bak'a. Mati—friends—the white G'aman told me about this visit when I was in the white man's city. Others have told me. People who come to me must be cared for. The white people are come. They sit among you. The Bak'a and his woman will put up their hammocks here. Here they will stay. The white man's goods are stored in the house in back of mine. The white man has much goods. There is a man from the city who helps them. He will sleep where these goods are stored. So I speak. That is my wish."

"Ya-hai, G'aman," came the assent from And'u.

"Kelele," said the chief in the yellow coat.

"The house in back of this I have had the women get ready also for the white man and his woman. When the chiefs gather for councils, and they want to be alone, the whites must have a place to go aside. I have given a house for the cook, and an open house for the cooking. So it is. People who come to me must be cared for."

"True, true!"

"So it is."

"Kodo!"

"White man," said the Granman, for the first time turning to us, "you have heard?"

574 For a few moments there was a rapid interchange between him and the old man in the yellow coat.

"The down-river men who have brought the white man," the Granman continued his cadenced speech, "will be housed in the village. The four Gankwe men will put up their hammocks in one house. The other four will be put up in my quarter. So it is. So I care. . . . "

"Yes, wise man."

"Gbolo!"

622 554 The ceremonial introductions followed, and each chief was praised for his special services to the Granman. The man in the yellow coat was of the Oyo people, a son of a great line, held high in the esteem of men and gods. Sungi was a man who knew much of the white man's wisdom. He had been to the French shore, and knew the French tongue, he knew about white man's medicine, but, friends, he was a child of the bush! And'u was a beloved chief, an honest man, a man to send on missions of trust. The bassia was a clever man, one of the men of And'u's village. The gods loved him, for what his hands touched turned to wealth. He was a good man. He was a friend.

A low cough was heard outside. Slowly the cloth was raised, and crouching into the hut came Kasanya and [941] Bibifo. They were carefully dressed, and each wore a kerchief drawn tightly about his head. These they wore by right of age.

622 576 The bassia, lowest in rank, was greeted first, and then each chief in his turn, until the Granman was reached.

574 "Greetings, G'aman."

"Thank you, friends," came the vibrant answer.

This began the colloquy of inquiry about each other's well-being, which here at court had a longer ritual than anywhere on the river. It was a prelude of measured song which introduced all speech between strangers. Bibifo began timidly and did not show himself equal to the many variations which Kasanya had introduced with ease.

"Friends, I am glad you came. You must tell me what is happening in your villages."

AT THE COURT OF THE GRANMAN

622
Now it was the Granman's turn to supply the interpolations, while Kasanya and Bibifo reported. 576 574

"Yes, so it is. So I know it to be myself. So I have heard," he spoke when they paused.

But when the ceremonial greetings were over, and the conversation turned to down-river affairs, the Granman leaned forward in his chair and talked with the men informally. They were all clan members, or men belonging to clans whose allegiance to the Granman's rule was undoubted, and they talked over many things in the way men do when they meet with their own kind. 622 643 521 [614]

The room was growing darker. Yankuso called through the slatted wall against which he was leaning, and the young man who had fired the guns entered.

? "Bassia, it is getting late. We must leave this house to the white man. These men with me are my friends. They must drink before they leave."

The bassia took the decanter from the table, and from the shelf underneath it, where we could dimly see shells and containers of shot, he took several small glasses. Before taking the glass to his lips, each man poured some of the liquor on the ground as a libation to the Earth Mother, and, as each drank, he turned to Yankuso and asked if he might leave. 576 893

"*Mi da permissi*—I grant you permission," he said to each.

When we had finished our meal, it was already dark. At the door of his own house, Granman Yankuso was sitting on a low stool.

"I have something for you," he said, disappearing inside his house. When he came out, he held in his hand some black object, which we were unable to identify. "You have fire?" he asked, as he suspended this object from a tree which grew between his house and the one in which we were staying. 354 574

"There was a white Hollander here who brought this to me. He went from here farther into the bush. He never came out. Light is a good thing at night. When visitors

354 come, I bring the lamp out. This is a big fire. In the village
974 of my father, across the river, they can see it."

The blazing light made the night seem darker.

"Bak'a," the Granman went on. "For many days you and your woman have been on the river. You are tired. Tomorrow, when you have slept, you will be refreshed. Tomorrow my chiefs will be here. You will tell us why you have come, what you want to do."

He turned toward his house.

"Du mundu, Bak'a," he said. "Let all sleep well."

Chapter XI

THE COUNCIL OF THE ELDERS

1

GRANMAN Yankuso's day began before the break 512
of dawn. When the day was at its coolest men's 643
hearts were cool, people said here on the river, and [826]
when hearts were cool they could be trusted with weighty matters. But long before men came to stand outside the Granman's house advising with him as he lay in his hammock, [623] the women arrived to report in low monotones the happenings of the previous day, and to take orders for the one to follow.

Lying in our hammocks in the council house, separated 512
from the speakers by the wall of palings and perhaps five feet of clearing, we could hear voices outside from a little after three in the morning, until with the coming day the soft footfalls died down and gave way to the sound of stamping mortars and the cries of children recalling their mothers from early tasks.

What was being said outside we could not hear, but as 194
the days wore on we learned to recognize the voices of the speakers. We learned to know from the rapid, contradicting flow of words which followed upon one of the Granman's orders, that it was his principal wife who spoke, or from the halting, crooning phrases, the voice of his eldest daughter, who had mastered her father's gentlest intonations and now of a morning brought them forth as though she were speaking her lesson. We learned to know as well the range and intensity of the subdued grunts with which

194 the Granman punctuated the pauses of the men, though not often their meaning.

623 But whatever the reports of the women, and the commands given by the Granman, the word for white man interspersed all of the morning's recitals, and the questions of the Granman and the answers often came fast.

Of the men, the Granman asked little. They came up in pairs usually, and now one, now the other took up the report. Clan names were spoken, and occasionally a village name was mentioned, but on the morning preceding the council of the chiefs, only one village was discussed, and one clan. The name of the village was the forbidden one where we had stopped for the night against the Granman's orders, and the clan was that of one group of our paddlers.

2

574 Early on the morning after our arrival at Asindopo Lantiwe, our paddlers came to see us in the council house. The Granman was busy outside his own house with the chiefs who had gathered for the council meeting, and these men who, like ourselves, were strangers here, came as comrades of an adventurous journey to visit with us and talk over the impressiveness of our reception and the allure of the women of the Granman's village, who were famous everywhere on the river. It was a village where chastity
[831] among the girls was closely watched, and where its women
[582] were given in marriage to the most influential men on the river.

302
391 The men were gotten up splendidly. Their bodies glistened with oil, their cloths were made of the long strips, pieced together by their women, and of patterns which the sun's rays had had no chance to pale. Sedefo's was particularly fine, we thought, but he assured us that it did not compare with the one the river had claimed. His cloth was also made of strips, but the stitching which connected them was a lacy weave, worked in triangles, and made to resemble the vertebrae of a snake. The border was of triangular

pieces of red and blue cloth worked with this thread, so that 302
again the white vertebrae showed. Bayo and Angita wore 291
their beads, and each had a garter below the knee of the
right leg. Their garters were white in color, but of a white-
ness which only new, unwashed cotton has. They were
about an inch and a half wide and were so tight that the
muscle of the calf bulged prominently. On their upper arms
were Kromanti rings of iron which, by contracting, warned [789]
the men of impending danger. In addition, Sedefo and
Angita wore the bell obia of the Gankwe people, and Bayo [832]
his love obia which had come from Lamé.

"When do you go, Sedefo?"

"When the G'aman speaks. When we finish a piece of 643
work, then we do not want to be paid at once. We do not 574
leave at once. It would be as if we had not gone together in 576
pleasure and wanted to be away as soon as possible. With
the white man it is one thing. In the bush we do not do it so.
Here in the G'aman's village, we do as we do with our own
people in the bush," he paused for an instant, and looked
about toward the clearing outside the palings. "There is
another thing. In the G'aman's village, men cannot leave
until the G'aman gives permission. When the G'aman is
ready, he will call us. We will speak together. Then we will
speak with him again. Then we will ask to go."

Bayo had been looking about the council house with an
interest which was not unmixed with awe at the Granman's
possessions, and he spoke in whispers.

"Ai, when the G'aman gives permission, then we go."

As he spoke, the cloth over the doorway was gently thrust 574
aside. Bassia Anaisi of the Granman's village entered. 622
He was the man who had fired the saluting gun the day of 576
our arrival and who had at the Granman's call come to
serve the visiting chiefs with rum. He now greeted each in
turn but did not take down a bench. For a moment he
stood there, head lowered out of deference to the character
of the place where he was, then he coughed slightly and,
turning to us, said, "The G'aman is ready for you. The
chiefs are here."

623 Our paddlers rose at once and left the council house. A
643 moment later And'u entered, followed by a group of elders
[291] with closely drawn kerchiefs covering their heads. Among
these only Kasanya and Bibifo were known to us. Kasanya
brought his bench close to ours and moved it yet closer,
with a gesture of the head that he wanted to continue the
intimacy of our ten days' journey together.

"White man," he said, leaning over and whispering, "call your man from the city. At a krutu a man has someone to speak for him. So we do here."

576 And so, we soon saw, it was. Address in the council of the
623 Saramacca people was always by indirection. If the Gran-
643 man wished to speak to one of his chiefs, then he gave his
message through another chief, though the man for whom
the words were intended might be closer to him or more
clearly in view.

643 Others came in, until the room was half filled when the
623 Granman entered. Today he wore a printed red and black
[292] loose coat of knee length, and over it the ceremonial cloth
worn by men here in the bush, so that where other men's
302 bare shoulders showed was the sleeve of his coat. On his
291 head were both kerchief and sun helmet. The men were
anointed with oil, and many of them wore the jaguar's
tooth obia. The last to enter was a man who was well past
middle age, and he was followed by the young *obiaman*
from S'ei. Both of these men wore the cloths required of
men when not at work, but they were not so uncreased,
or so new. Nor were their bodies bright with oil. The older
man had several broad stripes of white clay from wrist to
shoulder of his right arm, and from knee to pelvis on the
inner left thigh. Slung from one shoulder and reaching
across to the opposite thigh was a white obia made of
native fiber, and on his neck were several others. To these
[189] obias were added iron bands on his arms, while below his
right knee and at the ankle of his right foot were other
obias made of fiber and twisted black thread.

623 The men we knew greeted us as they took down their
benches and found places against the wall farthest from the

Granman's chair, and the Granman sent the dark flame of his eyes into all the corners of the house to verify the bassia's statement that all were there. The krutu was about to begin. 623

3

Discussion among the Bush Negroes is the close companion of authority, and both are symbolized in the word *krutu*. Krutu is at once court and parliament, and whether it was that two Bush Negroes wished to discuss the proffered price for a carved paddle, or whether the Granman and his elders met to assess a penalty against a recalcitrant village, the term applied was the same—krutu. [646]

We had had no little experience ourselves with krutu by the time we reached Asindopo Lantiwe. When our paddlers came to us again and again to suggest added fees for the journey upstream, they came to krutu with us. When at Gankwe it had been decided that Sedefo and his three companions might go with us, it was a krutu, and at Pa'aba when the men "went to one side" and decided we were not to be brought to the village where men whose spirits were strong danced Kromanti, it was again krutu. There were, too, the innumerable krutu in the villages on the way when we asked to buy carvings or obias or fish traps.

Now when the question was being decided formally whether we would be permitted to stay here on the upper river, it was again a krutu.

To understand what was implied in the term, how the Bush Negro himself regarded it, what the etiquette surrounding it was, and how it was integrated into the life of these people, it was necessary to range far and wide over this bush civilization. At the core of this word we found two ideas. One was the necessity of direction. "When the boat lacks a steersman, it sleeps quietly," these people say of a village whose chief is dead. Direction, authority was their legacy from Africa. Their ancestors had known the rule of dynasties, and the power of men who reigned. 641

But there was also the idea of the importance of free discussion, the need to weld authority and the will of those

641 over whom it was exercised. When the ancestors of the
Bush Negroes were brought to New World slavery, what
[569] measure of acquiescence they showed was due to the fact
that slavery was not an unfamiliar tradition to them. They
knew of the war captive, or the man convicted of a serious
crime, who was a slave to one of their own kind. But the
experience of the white man's slavery was a crucible in
which the ownership of man by man, and the unquestioning
obedience which men owed to those of higher rank, were
destroyed, leaving only the ideal of the life of free men.
"Free!" was the way in which one Bush Negro toasted
[203] another, or a white man, when he drank with him. A "*Man
Nengere*," an adult Negro was, above all, a free man, and
621 it was as a freeman that he was governed, for though
villages had chiefs, and there were bassias who were subordinate
to chiefs, and though above the village chiefs were
clan chiefs, and over them all the Granman, yet the final
word rested with the members of each subsidiary body,
and not with its leader.

624 Every village had its officials, and its medium for discussions.
622 Every clan had its head, and its old men, who,
[614] sounding out the will of the clan members, consulted with
that head when questions were to be decided. For the
decisions affecting the entire Saramacca River, there were
[643] the Granman and his krutu, before whom questions of
[692] larger policy or disputes between villages were brought.

Perhaps most impressive of all was the measure of autonomy
632 which each village had. A village, or certainly a group
614 of neighboring villages belonging to the same clan, formed
609 a small kingdom. A Bush Negro of another village who
came to visit, came as any stranger, paddle in hand, his
top cloth covering his loin cloth. When he found himself
in a strange village on a night when a dance was being
given, he did not join the dancers until after much urging
by a native of that village, and then he danced little, and
if he were a particularly fine dancer, he took care not to
flaunt his superior gifts. The exception to this, to be sure,
were the sacred dances, when a stranger, whose god came

to him when the drums called that god, could not be held accountable for what he did while his god had him in his control. 632 614 609

No stranger, no man who came to live in his wife's village, even though he had spent a good part of his life there, took it upon himself to offer advice to his wife's family. Again and again we would hear from men and women on the river, "In our village we do it this way," or, "We only carry the corpse on the head twice. Our spirits don't like to be troubled more often," or, "Mawu as a name for the Great God is used in our village, but not everywhere on the river." 614 602

There was the experience with several sacred images of village gods we had bought from an upper-river village. Our paddlers refused to carry them for us from the village to the boats, and it was with marked uneasiness that they permitted us to put them into the boats. 123 [778]

"We do not know what these gods can do. We do not know what is hateful to them. They are the gods of another people. We won't carry them."

But with the *gomi*—the child of the village of his mother's family, it was quite otherwise. He was a member of the village, he had a voice in its governing, he knew its gods. If he belonged to the family of the chief of the clan, if, let us say, his older brother were the chief, or if he was one of several nephews of a chief who had no surviving brothers, then at the death of the chief there would be a krutu, and the men of the village would decide which one of the several men who were eligible for the office was the most capable. Though rank was hereditary there was always selection among several heirs, and again the final word rested with the people of the clan. The offices of lesser chiefs—village chiefs who were subject to the clan chief, or bassias who served the chiefs—were passed on in the same manner. 622 624 [624]

While law making was in the hands of the chiefs, or captains, and the krutu over which they presided, law enforcement was the task of the bassias. It was they who saw to it that the orders of the chiefs were carried out. When 625 [622]

625 some action was decided upon by the krutu, the several bassias were entrusted with its execution. Most villages [562] had at least one woman bassia, and she was responsible to the village head for the behavior of the women. If food was to be gathered for a festival, if the village was to be cleaned for a special occasion like a visit to the village of strangers, it was she who saw that the work was done properly. If there were disputes between two women, it was she who carried the news to the village head, and she who transmitted his censure or decision, if the affair was not of sufficient gravity to warrant the calling together of the old men.

562 "Do the women talk in the big krutu?" we asked Bassia Anaisi, of the Granman's village.

"No, not in krutu. But they talk plenty at home."

623 624 The bassia, we learned, had other duties. He was not only the messenger of his chief, he was also his official spokesman at krutu, and his intermediary in all matters of authority. If a council of the village was to be called, it was he who announced this to the men. When the men had gathered, it was not the chief who spoke, but the bassia who propounded the questions at issue. It was for this reason that Kasanya had leaned over and advised us to call for our town man.

623 Krutu, we learned, were of two types. Every village had its "*G'a Sembe*"—its council of the older men—who acted as an advisory body to the village captain, and the "*Lanti Krutu*," the meeting of all the men of the village. In this latter general assembly rested the final decisions.

Any important issue involving the village would be handled in two krutu, the g'a sembe krutu, and the lanti krutu. In this big lanti krutu where all the man were represented the bassia would speak the words of the chief and of the old men, and then the people would "go aside." This going aside was the concomitant of every consultation, no matter how informal the group or how unimportant the question which was being considered.

643 821 776 623 "True, true, G'aman."

"Captain And'u, the gods sent the rain to cool everything when the Bak'a came. The gods of the river carried the Bak'a without mishap. We have heard of what the Bak'a has done. He has been at your country, at S'ei. He says he comes to learn. He says he does not come to buy wood or to work gold. What he says is good. Yet a full creek does not clear the bank of weeds. Tell us what the Bak'a did in your country, Captain And'u."

609 123 623 "The Bak'a came to S'ei. All that was there he looked at. He walked about the village. His woman talked to our women. The Bak'a spoke with our men. He asked about the obias in the krutu house. His woman asked our women about their gods. What was the name of the wife of the Gran Gadu, he wanted to know."

With every sentence, came the affirmation of the chief.

"So I know."

"So it is."

"By Ando!"

"So I heard."

And'u continued. "The Bak'a knows the land of the Negroes—*a sabi Afrika*. With him he has a great book. In it he has pictures."

"True, true."

"There are pictures of obias."

"Ya-hai!"

"There are pictures of the Kromanti houses."

"So it is!"

"There are pictures of people who have the gods."

"*Kweti-kweti*—No, no!"

"Yet pictures in S'ei the Bak'a did not make. The Bak'a said, 'If your ancestors tell you not to talk, do not talk. But when you talk, do not lie!' That which we did not wish to be done he would not do, his woman would not do."

"Gbolo!" exclaimed the Granman, "this is as I have heard. Now the Bak'a has come up the river. His woman has light hair, she is as our Tonê people. The river has treated the Bak'a well. The gods of the river have let the [776]
BAK'A PASS.

THE COUNCIL OF THE ELDERS

"Kodo!" 623
"Another letter has come, Bak'a. Will you read that 648
one, too?"

This was a communication written by a lumber factor 692
down the river. One of the villages, it seemed, was in 643
dispute with another over timber rights. The case was 648
laid before the Granman by the factor, who asked that 578
the controversy be settled promptly, since the dispute was [313]
keeping the men of both villages from cutting the lumber 623
which had been promised him.

Yankuso now spoke again: "You have heard the message, friends. The man who buys timber asks that I settle this dispute between two of our clans. Their villages are far from here. The clans of the Saramacca people can settle their own disputes."

"Gbolo!"

"So I say, friends. I can look at the cows, but from a distance I cannot tell how many there are. It is not for us here to decide this."

"*Kweti, kweti!*—No, no!"

"It is true, friends, as the Saramacca people say, 'The G'aman's breasts are for all his children.' But it is not my children who have come to me. Bak'a," he said, suddenly turning to us, "later you will write for me to this man who buys lumber. Tell him that for the sake of sweet soup a man eats sour dumplings. So I say."

The Granman looked about him. The heat of midday filled the darkness of the council house, and old Bibifo had dozed off. The gaze of the chief fixed him.

"Mati!" he said, when Bibifo stirred. "Sleep is death!"

Slowly the Granman's eyes circled the room until they came to us.

"The Bak'a has come," he repeated, with his slow 643
intonation, every syllable clearly enunciated. "When the 574
Bak'a came, the rain fell. From Asindopo Lantiwe we shot 821
guns of welcome, from Abenda Konde guns were shot. 623
In the heavens, the gods spoke them welcome. There was
thunder."

"*We go asri,*" we would be told when the question arose 623
how far we would travel on any given day, or when we 439
urged a reluctant man to sell a ceremonial bench with which he was loath to part. When the answer came back, it came as a unanimous decision of those most concerned. The members of his family had talked over their need for money and weighed that against his personal love for the object he had carved, and most often the decision was against his disposing of it. He cared for it, that meant it pleased his ak'a, his soul, and of what worth was money when it was a question of displeasing his soul, which might begin to trouble him?

"Bak'a, if we cut off our heads and sell them, then if we buy hats, where will we put them?"

So it was in krutu. The lanti, the people, discussed what 623
the bassia had said, as they went apart in small groups. From time to time, a bassia would be called to join one group and then another. What did the chief have in mind when he said this, or that? What did the old men think the consequence would be of the action under discussion? Was it desirable for the village to take a slight, and do nothing at this time? Was it necessary to arrange a compromise, instead of taking the matter into their own hands and beating the members of the offending clan?

After this discussion, each group came back to the 623
assembly united in its stand. If all the groups were agreed, 622
the matter was ended, and the wisdom of the chief and his councilors prevailed. If all disagreed, then it would have been temerity indeed for a chief to attempt to impose his will against the massed dissent. But if there was a lack of agreement, then the long debates would commence. Man after man would summon all his oratory to the argument, and for hours the various factions would speak. In the end, the will of the group would be swayed one way or the other, and a decision reached.

But this was only the procedure in the lowest assembly— 623
that of the village. As men grew older and their sons and 214

623 614 their nephews took up the dancing for the gods, their interests were directed more and more toward the clan rule.

"I do not dance any more," Sedefo had told us, "My [889] sons dance Kromanti now. I must do now what is expected of a man of my years. I must see that our people act wisely in all things which touch this world, and the world of our ancestors."

A clan krutu was a self-sufficient unit made up of members whose maturity fitted them for looking after the worldly and supernatural welfare of their people, for in the larger organization of the tribe it was the clans who stood one with another in perfect equality to complete the whole—the Saramacca people.

614 691 622 The chieftain of the principal village of the clan was the clan head. In him was vested the right to speak for the large grouping, and in the krutu which he conducted the etiquette approached that of the tribal krutu in its intricacy. The village where the clan head lived was inhabited predominantly by his people. In other villages on the river his people might be one of several clan groups. Several villages were inhabited by three or even four clan groups, each of which had its own captain. But such villages were not the seats of clan heads. Where a clan chief ruled would be not only the clan krutu house, but the shrines raised to the important dead of the clan, the clan ancestors whose spiritual powers to help and advise the living were as great as the feats they had accomplished when alive. Here, too, at the village where the clan head lived would be the shrines [778] to the gods who had the clan under their special protection. Above all, here under the direction of the chief were not only those who guided the worldly destinies of the clan, but those who knew how to control the supernatural forces. Here were the obias owned by the clan, those spiritual and unique healing powers whose magic would respond only to the will of clan members who had undergone the training which taught them to operate those forces their ancestors had left for them.

"I have my obia from Lamé," Bayo had said. "People like me because of this obia." 778 756

When we came to Lamé we found that the people who inhabited it controlled more than the love obia. They had a powerful fighting obia, too. There was not only *bumba*, that gave power in love, but also *poitchi*, the obia that helped a man in a fight. But one who wanted to become a great hunter did not go to Lamé. Such a person sought out an obia man of the Dombi clan, who, working with the power of *mafungi*, helped him to see his game in the dark bush, though the animal was of the color of the bush itself, and, once having tracked it, helped him make his aim deadly. A man suffering from a bad gunshot wound would try to get an obia man from the Loango people to come and [755] call on the powers of the Loango clan-obia to heal the dying man. For broken bones there was magic in the sacred village of Dahomey where centered the Kasito clan, and at Dahomey was also the best magic on the river for warriors. '*Bofyuando* and *sokoma'usu* were the two great warrior obias, and so powerful were they that if one but whispered their names, without taking the stems of two weeds, putting one crosswise on top of the other, and over them passing a coin to recompense for speaking the sacred names, the man who spoke would die. These obias belonged to the Kasito people, so strong in magic.

Of these clans there might be twelve or thirteen or fourteen. 614 Among the Saramacca people, we learned, the clan partakes of the mysterious, the awesome. Our Bush Negro friends did not discuss their clans readily, and none of them would give us a list of their names. A few might be mentioned by one man, a few by another.

"To speak of the *lo* is not a thing for strangers," we were told. "My clan I can name, and another man can tell you the name of his clan. My father's clan I can name, too, but not others."

On one occasion we had made clear to a young man who had been away for some time in French Guiana, and who considered himself a man of the world, why we sought the

614 clan names. He went to his mother's brother, and asked for the origin of his own clan, and the relationship that existed between the lo to which he belonged and the others.

"It is for the old men to know," his uncle replied. "When you are old, you will know these things."

"But you must tell me. It is my *right*," the young man insisted.

"It will be your right," the older man corrected him.

And there the matter rested. But from one, and from another, we gathered the clan names. One village belonged to one clan, its obia was confided to us, and at another village we learned the name of still another clan. So the list of names slowly grew—ten, twelve, thirteen, fourteen. But some clans were paired in a fashion we could not fathom, and when the clans are grouped so as to express the tribe as a whole, the expression that is used is that of "the twelve lo."

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493 The clan we found to be rooted deep in the land. Each clan had its own territory, and in the region it controlled only the men of the clan might fish in the creeks or fell the hardwood trees which the white man in the city bought. All of the up-river clans had land on the lower river near the railhead, and an important down-river clan, like that of the Gankwe people, had land deep in the interior. Whether fear of invasion, on the one hand, or the need to have their own strongholds in the event of factional disputes, on the other, dictated this division of the land, it was, of course, impossible to determine. Yet it was unquestionably useful for a clan to have representation up and down the river in this fashion. Thus a man, as he traveled up or down the river, would be sure of at least one or two places where he might count on receiving the welcome due him as one who is at home among those who have come from the same "old mother," and where he might feel spiritually safe among people of his own blood, and among the same gods as those of his own village.

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619 Village, clan, and above these the tribe. So it was that the political order of the Bush Negro was integrated. Tribal

assemblies such as were reported from the Awka people 631
on the Marowyne were here not called regularly. There 619
was no central body here to make decisions. The autonomy of village and clan seemed almost unquestioned. There were, to be sure, clan alliances, but these bore more directly on the factions which had formed to control the choice of the next headman. At this krutu, therefore, which had just 627
gathered, there were Captain Sungi, head of the Kasito or 623
Dahomey clan, and And'u, the able chief of the Dombi people, and the headman of the Popoto people, and the headman of the Anago. But Fandya of Baikutu who headed the Nasi people was not there, nor were the Awana people represented, nor the Alabaisa, nor Kwama, nor Bi'ito, nor Fandaki, to cite some examples. Of the missing chiefs, several of them lived a considerable distance from the seat of the Granman, and indeed had been to his village but few times.

"Ai, men must krutu," Kasanya had told us one day 627
on the river. "If a few men decide, then the others have anger in their hearts. That is not good. When the lanti meets, and all men talk, then those who came with anger cool their hearts. Talk is good."

And another time, Sedefo had found occasion to quote the proverb, "If you have not settled one thing, you cannot go on to the second." The best way was to talk things over until all men saw that what was proposed was good or bad.

4

In the krutu house of Asindopo Lantiwe the Granman 623
began to speak. 574

"Mati—friends—the white man has come. He sits there. 643
With him is his wife. She is there beside him. The man from the white man's city has come. He is there. He will speak for the white man. The white man has a cook. The cook is outside."

"So it is, G'aman," said Captain Sungi.

"Mati, the white man came. All who come to me must eat. The white man must eat."

"True, true, master of the realm."

623 "Bassia," said the Granman, as he turned to the young
574 man who had come to announce the krutu to us, "go and
643 tell the lanti the white man has come. Tell the lanti the white man must be fed. All who come to this place must eat. Tell the people they must hunt and fish. Let them bring their kill to us here. Let them bring the fish they catch in their traps. Let all know, and may the gods favor their hunting."

"Ai, clever master," came the response, as the bassia left to issue the orders of the Granman.

623 "Bak'a," he said, turning to us, "you come from the
648 city of the white man. The G'aman of the white man, in the white man's city, two moons ago, sent a message to us. It is here." He rose from his chair, and reached for several envelopes which were inserted in the chains of the hanging lamp. "What has been written, we cannot read. You know the writing that white men know. Read what the G'aman of the white man has said."

We opened the letter, with its great official seal. In it was a message from the Governor of the Colony, telling Granman Yankuso of our projected trip to the country of the Saramacca people, asking that we be received by him at his village. All this was read in its translation and transmitted to the Granman by our town man. As he spoke, it was the Granman who punctuated his pauses with the ceremonial affirmations.

"So it is."

"So I hear."

"It is as I know."

All listened attentively to the reading of the letter, and when it was concluded, the Granman turned to the members of the krutu.

"Captain Awagi, when I go to the white man's city, word is sent on ahead so that the people of the city know when the G'aman of the Saramacca people comes. So it is in the bush. When a white man comes to the bush, it is well that from the white man's city they tell me who is coming."

Bak'a pass. Friends, the river is more than I am. . . . Let 609
us hear what the Bak'a has done on the river. Friend Kasanya, 123
you have traveled with the Bak'a. Speak of what he 623
has done."

"It is as Captain And'u has said," Kasanya began, "what was forbidden, the Bak'a did not do."

The Granman interposed an objection.

"I sent a message to the Bak'a by the husband of my daughter. To him I said, speak to the Bak'a, say that at all villages on the Saramacca you will be received. But two villages have not walked well with the G'aman. At those you will not stop. Yet at one of them the Bak'a stopped."

"So it is, cunning master. This was how it happened. Darkness was falling. Everywhere was the big bush. A storm was on its way."

"So I know."

"There were no other villages near. The next one could only be reached after dark. There were bad rapids ahead."

"So I understand."

"The Bak'a woman was in the boat. To make camp before the storm came was not possible. We had a krutu. We spoke with the Bak'a. The Bak'a said we must go where we could find a roof."

The Granman grunted, was silent for a moment, then took up the story. 623

"Friends, night overtook the white man in the bush. 891
He had a woman with him. The men said they could not 776
make camp at night. The white man took his woman to where there was shelter. Into the village he did not go. At the first house he slept. Early in the morning he left. He does not know the river. The men brought him at dark to the forbidden village. The gods sent a great wind when the Bak'a crossed the river to show their displeasure, but the Bak'a and his woman they did not harm. The gods took it into their hands. The gods are more than I am."

"So it is, G'aman." 609

"Friends, the children of the bush know what is done 623
in the bush. Yet a man's lips must speak for himself. Let 183

609 623 the Bak'a himself tell why he has come the long way to the Saramacca river and what it is he seeks."

183 There was a general chorus of agreement, and silence awaited our accounting.

As the town man began to repeat our words to the Granman, the quiet of the house was heightened by an occasional stirring outside the paling. From where we sat, we could see brown motionless feet, which told us that there were many more than those inside, who were listening to the white man's reason for being in the bush.

Again the Granman made the traditional responses.

"So it is, white man."

"True, what you have said, bassia."

Finally our telling was at an end. Again there was a silence as we sat, tensely waiting.

The Granman again broke the silence.

"Friends, chiefs, you have heard. The white man is here. He comes to learn of our life. The gods of the river have 776 821 183 brought him and his woman safely. The Great God sent the rain to cool the air when he reached Asindopo Lantiwe. The gods are more than I am. The river is more than I am. But the Saramacca people are also more than I am. It is you, headmen of the Saramacca people, who must speak."

"Ai, G'aman," said the man who had the stripes of white on him and who wore the many obias. "But have the ancestors spoken?"

"Truly you ask, friend," was the response. "It is well that you think of these things. In the bush, we think before we speak. Do you go aside and consider well."

Slowly the members of the krutu arose from their 576 benches. Softly, with bent form, each passed out of the doorway. We were alone with the Granman, who waited with us for the reply of the chiefs.

5

623 693 As the elders slowly filed out of the council house, it was as though a jury were leaving the courtroom to decide a case which had been laid before it. And as we learned more,

623 enough if the accused persisted in denying such crimes.
695 In that case he called upon the gods to witness that the sin of which he was accused had not been committed by him, and this called for trial by ordeal.

695 The ordeal as a judicial measure was not unknown to our own civilization. In Africa it flourished in the native courts before the coming of the white man, and, it is whispered, still persists in the Suriname bush. The facts as we tell them, we cannot vouch for from our own experience. They were given us independently by two men who have spent many years among the Saramacca people, men who speak the language fluently and who for long periods have lived in this big bush of the Saramacca tribe. Other facts which they told us we had been able to corroborate. These whispers, however, we could not check, for few Bush Negroes would admit that they knew anything of the ordeal.

One way of trial by ordeal was to "*bebe so'i*," to drink the oath. It was utilized in accusations of witchcraft and sorcery. The priests and the elders prepared a drink of deadly poison. Over it magic incantations were pronounced by the obia men. The oath of innocence was taken, and the accused drank. If the potion was retained and the man died, his guilt had been proved, but if the drink was vomited, he was innocent. What his redress was if he were proved not guilty, we were not able to discover.

"If a man is guilty of *wisi*—of evil magic," our friend said, when he told us the story, "he would be afraid of the oath. When it came time to drink, no matter how brave he was, he would confess."

695 Then there was the proof offered in adultery cases,
684 described to us by the other man who knew the ways of the Saramacca folk. When both man and woman who had been accused of misconduct denied their guilt, the procedure this man had witnessed was this. The woman was made to kneel before the assembled krutu of the village. While she knelt there, a buzzard's feather was put into water, in a calabash of the kind they call gubi, and the water was

we found that for the krutu to act as a jury was an important 623 693 part of its work. The krutu not only saw to the making of law, but it was also the medium for levying penalties upon those who transgressed law. The same krutu that legislated could judge infractions of its legislation. In its hands was the power to enforce the decisions it had made against the offender.

We had wondered whether, in this Suriname bush, the 623 693 681 African court which so characterized the civilization of the ancestors of these people had survived. When we heard of the supernatural vengeance which followed upon infractions of custom, we sought to find out if people took the matter of punishment into their own hands, if kunu was reinforced by human assistance.

"Ai, mati," a chief once said to us, "kunu is strong, but the krutu is strong, too."

If a man had sworn an oath against another, had called down upon another a curse of some evil spirit, or asked [683] that the gods make a man impotent, or that they stop the womb of his wife from conceiving, or if a man murdered by means other than witchcraft, then he was judged by a krutu. A man who had destroyed a canoe belonging to [685] another—a serious offense, for, as the Bush Negro says, "Had our forefathers not had the wisdom to build canoes, we would still be slaves to the Bak'a"—he, too, would come before this court. The adulterer would be brought [684] here for the assessment of his fine.

When the krutu sat as a court, the accused was not without 623 695 the right of defense. If it were thieving, or adultery, or the telling of falsehoods, or trespass, or the destruction of the property of another, where the kunu involved was not of the greatest, then the case was judged on the basis of the evidence. In the court, the interests of the one who was accused were cared for by one of the elders of his *mbe*, his relative and a fellow member of his own great family. But when the crime was one of the greater ones, then methods other than the sole use of testimony were employed. Evidence was necessary, but evidence was not

treated with obia. An obia man now addressed the woman 695
who denied the charge that had been lodged against her, 684
restating the accusation and her denial. Then he asked her once more if she were guilty, and when the answer was still "No," the test was applied.

Through the woman's tongue the quill of the feather, which had been treated with magic, was thrust. When the entire length of the feather had passed through the tongue, then it was that the proof was had. If the woman's tongue neither swelled nor showed blood, she was innocent.

But whether it be trial by ordeal or through the taking of testimony, punishment by the krutu went along with punishment by the spirits. Only incest, we learned, was not punishable by the court. That was for kunu alone to avenge.

6

Once more the krutu was in session. Where the men had 623
"gone aside," we did not know, but while we sat in the 133
krutu house, alone with Moana Yankuso, we heard nothing. 574
The Granman had spoken little. Were our hammocks tied well the night before? Were we satisfied with the arrangements he had made for the storing of our supplies?

What were the elders deciding? We could not but wonder with anxiety. Would this krutu, after the fashion of the bush, where time meant so little, come to no decision? Was the answer to be one that had been previously arranged?

Chief Sungi was the first to speak.

"G'aman, we have gone aside. Your captains and bassias have spoken together. We say, the white man has come. The white man must eat. Let all be told to bring gifts, that you may feed those who have come to you."

"So it is," was the Granman's response. "Friends, great thanks to you. What you have said is good. Let all return to their villages. Let all tell their people that the white man has come. Let all come with gifts, that we may eat."

There was a chorus of affirmations. The Granman arose.

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123
574
"White man," he said, "I have told the young men to hunt, I have told them to fish. My captains, who are here, are going to their villages. You have heard. Their women will come with rice. The young men will bring their kill. So it is in the bush. So G'aman Yankuso holds those who come to him."

As the elders, each with his word of leave taking, left the house to us, we thought of the Granman's last words and of the verdict of the krutu. We had sat long enough in this assembly to realize the circumlocution which went with all statement, and we tried to decipher the cryptic words of the chiefs. Was it a verdict at all? Or was it merely a way of refusing to come to any decision when the white man sat in the krutu which was deciding the fate of his visit? That the decision would be reflected in the attitude of the people of the village seemed reasonable to suppose. And so, drawing aside the curtain which hung over the door, we went out into the open square before our house to see what the krutu had decided.

Chapter XII

WOMEN AT WORK

1

A WOMAN stood in the council house, dipping her hand into a calabash and spraying the ground and walls. East and west, north and south she turned, with her fingers pointed downward toward the hard clay floor, then with palm upturned sending the water toward the thatch. 787

[539]

Evil spirits,
You must not come here,
You must dwell in the bush,
The bush is big.

O spirits,
Do not come here,
Remain in the bush,
The bush is big.

Startled by the white woman, who had taken her unawares, she allowed no apology. Her wet hand went quickly to her lips to show that not a word was to be uttered. In silence she withdrew, beckoning the white woman to follow her, and not until they were well away from the house did she break her silence.

"Come with me. Inside there no one must speak."

Some day, before we left, she might be able to tell what she had done and what weeds had gone into the water.

782 Now she could but say that the Granman had asked her to see to this.

"It is good medicine. Do not be afraid," she added, reassuringly.

She led the way to her quarter, but before we had gone past the open shrine she stopped, and her eyes narrowed as she tried to come to a decision. From the quarter we were approaching came a crooning, moaning sound.

787 "A god speaks. The Apuku god has come to a woman this morning. Come. We will go to the G'aman's women," she said as she retraced her steps.

644 888 On a squared log in back of the enclosed shrine which adjoined the council house sat the Granman's principal wife. She was a woman who in her prime must have had beauty, but, though still erect, she had deep grooves on her face, and her breasts were the breasts of an old woman. Her head was closely shorn, as was the way of women whose children were grown. Like any other woman of the village she wore only the short cloth and the bit of kerchief which showed at her waist. Like the others she went to the provision ground almost daily. She and her younger daughter, who was named Wilhelmina for the Queen of Holland, [462] cared for their field together, and now they were working side by side.

644 Wilhelmina was more robust than her mother could have been at her age. She was tall, more her father's daughter. It was she who served his food and looked after his personal needs. She was the wife of the man who had brought the boat which Sedefo had rejected, because he did not trust its spirit. As she worked, her two children were with her, [856] the elder a child of three, sitting on the ground at her feet, and the other on her back, or in her lap nursing while she did her tasks.

Unlike her older sister, Wilhelmina had little of her father's astuteness, of his quick eye, or his schooled tongue. She went about with the slow, sensuous grace of someone not quite awake, while her older sister busied herself with making the rounds of the village, observing this and that

which went on, so that she might recount it to her father. 644
The women of the village walked "softly" with this older daughter. "Daughter of the G'aman," they called her when they addressed her, and her mildly spoken, persuasive suggestions were never ignored.

Wilhelmina, however, busied herself at her work, and if anything were asked of her, she would look up with an expression of bewilderment. Differing from other women of the village, who had come to live there after marriage and knew the speech of the less aristocratic down-river settlements, Wilhelmina had never been any distance from Asindopo Lantiwe. The other women were, therefore, constantly interpreting the questions which were being put to her.

She was dark of skin, as dark as her sister, but her face [142]
had a flush of red in it, as though she had brushed it with
the sacred red kuswe. A little above her wrists gleamed wide [301]
bands of tin. These were bracelets her husband had made
for her, and they were much prized. The brass coils which
she once wore had been filed through and removed, for [843]
when the ankles of a woman who bore children swelled,
it became necessary to be rid of these ornaments.

In a small mortar, decorated with carvings, she was [252]
pounding maripa nuts. The ends of the pestle were bordered
with finely cut cross hatchings. [412]

"Ai, we use much palm oil here," she said.

Her mother was paring cassava. At her feet were several 644
baskets and pieces of bark, shaped like miniature canoes, 252
into which she threw the peeled cassava. Near these con-
tainers lay a sifter, woven of palm fiber, and a grater, [285]
made of a thin board perhaps sixteen inches long and half as wide, into which long slender nails had been hammered and their points filed to a needle-like sharpness. When the tubers were peeled, Wilhelmina began the grating, first squatting down, then dropping to her knees, better to work. The grated cassava was then packed into the matapi, the cassava press which had before leaned against the house. This matapi was of a basket-like weave, golden in color

644 252 and tall as the Granman's wife herself, though in circumference no larger than the post of the house against which it leaned. The woven strands were caught together in the loops with which it was finished on top and bottom.

When it had been filled, the matapi was hung from the stub of a stout limb, and one end of an equally stout stick was inserted into the bottom loop, while the other rested on the ground. Now Wilhelmina and another woman sat down on this stick, and under the pressure exerted by their combined weight the matapi slowly contracted. A milky white fluid containing the poison which made the raw bitter cassava so deadly filtered through the woven strands, trickling into the gourd placed to receive it. Steadily the poisonous fluid was forced out until it was not long before the gourd was filled, and the cassava pressed dry. When there was much work to be done, and the white woman was not about to ask questions, the women would not waste their time sitting on the stick, but instead would suspend heavy stones from thongs tied to the bottom loop, and they were then free to be about their other tasks. Now, however, it was more amusing to sit and talk.

Whatever the method, when the meal was rid of the poison, it was worked through the sifter into a closely woven basket, and in that kneaded and made ready for baking
[177] on the large iron griddles. The use of the bitter cassava they had learned from the Indians, and the names for the sifter and the cassava press were to this day Indian, as were their weave and shape, but the griddles came from the white man's city.

[415] "We use Indian water jars, too. The red pottery we do
[177] not make. But black obia pots are Negro things. These
[887] our old women mold," said the Granman's wife.

2

644 286 As she spun cotton for the garters she would later make, the woman they called the Granman's younger wife sat and talked of working the fields. Her spindle, a small iron

rod set into a base of clay, rotated steadily as she worked. 644 Her fingers moved fast, for she did not require too fine a 286 thread. The raw cotton, she said, she got from a wild "cotton tree." Cotton which was picked in the fields and which grew from seeds planted in the ground, she did not know at all. Was there such cotton?

Working in the fields, she continued, was not too difficult. 644 It was a woman's work. A woman did not mind it. From 241 earliest childhood girls followed their mothers about, and [462] learned how to work the fields. [868]

"What is hard is having to cut my own field. I have no man to cut it for me. I must cut it myself."

She paused for an instant to right her thread.

"When I plant my field, and pray to the gods to make the seed grow, then I ask the Earth Mother to help me find a way to get a man to cut my field for me. 'Earth Mother,' I say, 'help me find a man to cut my field. I have great need of a man to burn my ground.' . . ."

Seeing two women approach, she said, "Fenekonde here is like myself, she too needs a man to cut her field."

But this needed explaining. Here were two women who called the Granman "husband," and who shared the difficulty of having to clear their own fields.

It was soon made apparent, however, that both of these 644 women were only nominally wives of the Granman. They 241 had married into his family. When kunu, however, killed 589 one successor to his office after the other, these women were made widows. Like the widow who now worked alone before her house which fronted the clearing, where stood the shrine to the great gods and the Granman's principal houses, they had worn tattered clothes, and a twisted kerchief as a band on their heads. For five months this had lasted, and then a dance was given.

Did the white woman know about the ceremony called *pai Adyo?*

The white woman had heard the word Dyo-dyo from 774 natives of the town many times. Once, indeed, a question about it put to an old woman, who it later developed was

774 at the time approaching a state of possession, had provoked great anger.

"If you do not know what the Dyo-dyo is, then you are not human. Then I won't talk to you. Have you never walked and felt something in back of you, yet nothing was there? Have you never had a dream?"

The Dyo-dyo was one of two souls with which each individual was born, the old woman had later been persuaded to explain, for each man had his akra, his personal soul, which if he were mindful of it, remained with him, and allowed no evil to come to him; and each man had his
[775] Dyo-dyo, his wandering soul. At death the soul which had
wandered came back to the body. If it were permitted to stray once more, this soul, which had been ever restless in life, would wander about troubling the living.

796 But now, sitting among the women in back of the Gran-
man's shrine, it seemed again best to admit that she knew
765 nothing of the adyo ceremony. Fortunately, there was no outburst of anger this time, for here in the true, true Saramacca country, it was soon evident that there was a
[186] pride in their magic, and their language, because these were
held to be uniquely their own.

"We give a big play for the breaking of mourning." All
[534] the drums were played, and the rattles sounded, and the *kwakwa*—the hard-wood bench played with two sticks—was beaten.

For this important ceremony, the oldest living brother
[273] of the dead man provided food and rum, and, when the time came to partake of this food, he and the *kei mundu*—the people of rank—sat about the doorway of the widow's house. She herself stood inside the house, behind the threshold, scattering food for the dead, and pouring rum on the
[262] ground. Rice and peanuts and sugar cane were thrown
away, but not yams or plantains, for those things were not given in their village to the ancestral spirits. As the widow "threw away" the food she wept. In the clearing those who did not eat danced adyo. In a circle, men and women danced in close file, one behind the other, each

holding a stick the size of a well-grown boy's arm. Round 796
and round they went, as the widow from her doorway 765
moaned her lament, and guns sounded in honor of the dead.
The more important the man, the more guns were fired. [554]
Their own men had been the Granman's brothers. There
was shooting till . . . till late afternoon, when they
could not delay the bathing at the river any longer.

Before dark, all had to go to the river to bathe, and the 768
widow, too, was led there with the others. There she purified [783]
herself, and discarded her mourning clothes, drawing on 796
new cloths, and making herself fit with ornaments for
the ceremony of rejoicing. This was followed by dancing
which lasted late into the night. All the gods might be
danced to at an adyo ceremony—Adonko; Vodu, the snake;
Opete, the buzzard; Tigri, the jaguar; and all the gods of the
bush and the ant hill—and, at the beginning, the seketi
social dances and the half-sacred awasa. These dances
were held for the spirits of men and women alike, and it did
not matter whether the dead, or the living members of the
family of the dead, shared these gods with the rest of the
villagers, or not.

"But mourning is not over yet," said Fenekonde. 768

Seven months more elapsed, she showed on her fingers, 587
before a woman might cohabit with her brother-in-law.
If there was no brother-in-law to take her, then a woman
had to wait twelve months after the adyo ceremony,
instead of seven.

"If a woman doesn't care for her brother-in-law," continued Fenekonde, "or he doesn't care for her, then, when the seven months have passed, he comes to her hammock for two nights. Then she can go to another man at once."

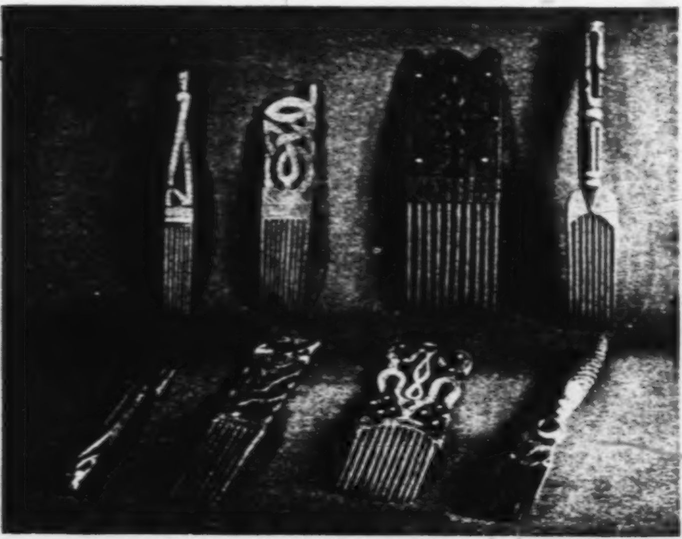
When the husband who had died left no brothers, and there was no one else in his family to take the widow, the family of the dead man sought out a husband for her.

"They look and they look, until they are weary," said the Granman's younger wife, "but a man must be found before a woman can come out of mourning."

1: Herskovits & Herskovits E-5 (1928-1929) 1934

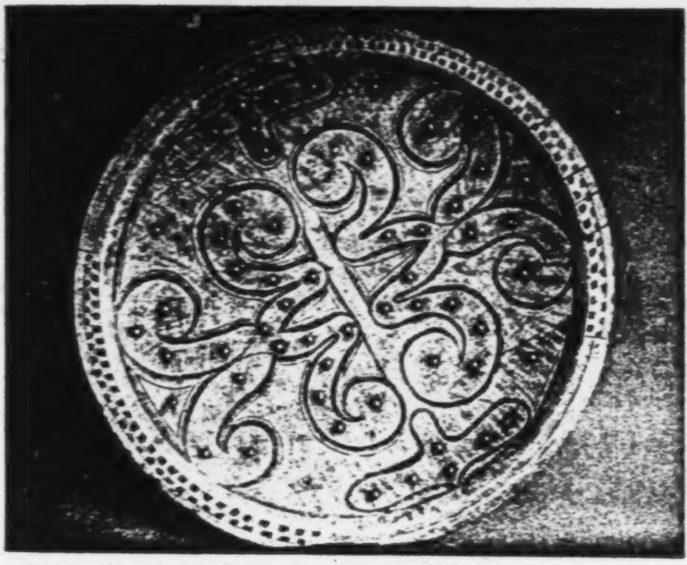
SR8 Bush Negroes SR8
Saramacca

301
532



Combs, the gifts of men to women.

415
532



A tray for winnowing rice. (Symbolism on pages 282–283.)

[Facing p. 214]

(Facing page 214)

765 And Fenekonde said, "Mourning is hard. The widow
must not go to the river alone to wash. Other women must
take her there. Her husband's spirit might seize her. Her
[775] hair must be cut. If not, he will get her by the hair. Her
clothes must be ugly. She must keep herself unclean, so
that his ghost will not long for her when he sees her."

But mourning was difficult not only for a woman. A man's mourning period was no less burdensome, they added. He too wore old clothes. When he went to wash, his wife's brother took him to the river. If he had another wife, he did not go into the hammock with her, for the dead woman would be envious and would kill him.

765 There were times, however, when women did not go into
mourning for their husbands. If a woman carried a child
843 in her womb, then she did not put on mourning clothes at
all. She did not weep, she was not allowed to show any grief. That same night the dead man's oldest living brother would come with her in the hammock. If there were no brother, another man would come, for some man had to come.

"He must come. It cannot be otherwise. She cannot go to her hammock alone. So it is every night when a woman carries a child in her womb. A man must be with her, for the sake of the child."

3

243 In the clearing the widow stood stamping rice. About
644 her the rice hulls flew and made a half circle of gold at her
dark feet. Her mortar, which was made of a hollowed-out
[415] log, like a drum, was large and reached almost to her hips.
On the ground was a large tray which she used for winnowing the rice. With slow, regular beats she lifted and dropped
[412] the pestle, and as her body swung with its slow motion the
[854] head of the sleeping child on her back rolled this way and
that.

768 Her two small boys had gone to live in her mother's
644 village, but this girl child remained with her. She was born

more than a year before her father's death and therefore 644 768
had not saved her mother from mourning.

"My sons are big so," she showed, pointing to the 768
mortar, "and already my brother takes them with him 868
down the river, and when they are with him he tells them 604
about the creeks and the trees, and where the villages are 524
which are friendly to our people. But when they come here 644
to see me, then they play. They have play guns and play arrows which they make themselves. Into the uncleared bush they shoot them until I call them away to eat. Here I have no man from whom they can learn. Here they only play."

But boys liked to be with men. When the rains came, her brother would let them sit by when he carved, and, seeing him work, they would take up a knife and begin whittling. That was how boys learned to do men's work.

Women children played with "gossi." She put down her 857
pestle, and felt about in her cloth where the child slept, and 524
brought out a gourd, resembling in size a small cucumber. 644
It had beads on top for eyes and a few deft cuts to indicate nose and mouth, while above the eyes was crosshatching for the hair. Until girls were old enough to be of use in the fields, they sat about in the clearing playing with these dolls.

"When they are four and five, then they like to work."

There was, of course, dancing. All dances were opened
by the children, and at six and seven the girls knew seketi [535]
and awasa, and bandamba, and the boys danced susa.

"Do you dance susa?" we asked the Granman's five- 856
year-old grandson, who was standing with us beside the 644
widow.

"Ai," he said, but once our attention was turned to him 609
he said also, "White man, the children say you carry money in this." He touched a water canteen which hung from the stranger's belt. "I know it is water."

He knew also that shaving cream was soap, and not white people's sacred clay, and now as women came with bottles for the white man's obia water—a name they gave

856 to all the medicine we had for them—he took it upon him-
644 self to instruct them to wash the bottles carefully, as he
609 followed us to the storehouse, and to warn them that what
was given was not to be taken internally.

"*A taki, a taki-e, u' no mu' bebe*—He says, he is saying, you must not drink this," he explained, with something of his mother's persuasiveness in giving instructions.

His grandmother had said one day half in jest that he would have a tiger spirit which would need to be reckoned with when he grew to manhood. He was a straight-limbed, wiry child, not troubled with the umbilical hernia so often
[164] met with in children here in the bush, or with the distended "cassava belly."

The coming of the strangers had eclipsed all desire for
[857] familiar diversions here. From early morning the children of the village stood about watching us, so that the brushing of teeth and the lacing of boots were carried on under excited supervision which continued day after day. But to this small grandson of Yankuso we were visitors in his quarter, and whether we were alone in the council house or were in the small house reserved for privacy, he would find his way there and stand about asking questions.

Sometimes, however, when he found us at work and saw that we did not wish to be interrupted, he would lean against the wall for a long time watching us in silence, until presently he would come to life, as it were, walk over to the table, and begin beating the Kromanti rhythm on it.

856 But he was not the only child who knew the drum
533 rhythms. In the last village in the Pikien Rio, we met a
868 two-year-old child who came to us with more than usual
readiness and followed us about, his hand in ours until we came to his mother's house, where he left us to sit down on a wooden plank which lay near it. We had been in conversation with the older people and did not notice his going, until all at once we heard the slow beating of the rhythm to the Sky God. It was this child of two, drumming against the plank on which he sat.

“*A naki apinti, ai!*—He is playing the apinti,” his father 856
said, laughing, and a woman who stood by said that when 533
he grew up he would have an important god. It would be a 868
good god, too, and it might be a great Komfo—a priest
reincarnated in him.

Among the little girls who were with us most often, and 857
now stood by with Yankuso's grandson, were the two
daughters of Dida, the wife of Chief And'u of S'ei, who
went about the Granman's village with white on her face
and body. The little girls were also washed in the white
clay, and there was white in the wool of their hair. They
had the quick, startled movements of their mother, and one
of them in particular was a nervous child, shy and easily
frightened. She never came too close to the strangers, and, [609]
for a time, if they but caught her eye, she would begin to
tremble with fear.

“Your daughters are handsome, Dida.” 776

“Ai, they come from a good line,” she said, laughing. 868

The Granman's younger wife said, “They will have many
gods when they are big. They will have them from their [845]
mother, and theirs will be stronger yet. They are twins.”

It was possible, she explained, by looking at a child to know if it would have the gods of the family. Sometimes the gods took a dislike to a child and refused to give it of their wisdom or protection, and sometimes the gods liked it so well that they gave it many gifts—the gift of a fine singing voice, the ability to dance better than others, and the good fortune to be liked.

“Until they are grown, the gods do not trouble them much,” she added, “but we in the bush know a child who will have important gods, and we know if the gods will be kindly.”

“Do you mean you know because of kunu?”

“*Ma kye*, all gods do not come from kunu.”

4

One day when sitting among the women, the talk was of 845
twins.

845 "The next time you come to the Saramacca country, you must have twins here," the women said, laughing, "then you will see what a play we give for them. And for a child born after twins, and for a child who is born feet foremost."

The last, however, was not good, and they were really not in earnest, they explained, in wishing that type of childbirth upon the stranger.

"Such a child has a bad spirit. The mother almost always dies when giving birth."

"Is there no obia to save her?"

"The gods can save the mother if they wish. . . . "

There were special songs for twins which were sung when
bandamba was danced. Several of the women, and Dida
among them, began to sing them. The songs praised the
generative powers of the man and woman who had "made"
twins. As the women began their songs, they rose from
their work and danced, for just as they could not
533 remember the words of a song apart from its melody, so
535 they could not sing the melody without the accompany-
845 ing dance movements which went with it. Words and
melody and movements of the body were all part of the
image evoked by the word "bandamba." With arms firmly
planted on their hips, and feet slightly apart for balancing,
the slow rhythmic play of abdomen, hips, and buttocks
went on and on.

But as they sang and danced, the Granman's younger wife suddenly remembered that their voices must carry to the council house, and abruptly the women stopped, covering their faces.

"We're ashamed," Dida explained.

"But the men see you dance bandamba when you give your plays for twins, and the child after twins, and for marriages?"

"Yes, but then it's singing and dancing at a play."

When an occasion called for these songs and dances, it was quite another matter, she implied.

"It is not good to do this for sport."

WOMEN AT WORK.

5

Tenemi made ready to carve a calabash dish. She sat 322
down on her work stool, and on the ground beside her she 532
put down a small knife, a piece of broken glass, and half of
a calabash shell. The inner pulp had just been removed,
and both the inside and outside of the gourd were of a pale
green color. She had dipped it in water before she brought
it here, and now with the point of her knife she deftly
marked her design. The curves in the center, covering
almost the entire inner surface, formed the body of a
woman, she said, who was big with child. The geometric
tracings in parallel narrow lines across one portion of the
top was the Aboma snake, euphemistically called the G'añ
Tetei, the great creeper, or vine. Taking up the piece of
glass, she began to scrape away carefully the soft pulp
inside the outlines of her design.

In the entire village there was no woman who worked
faster at carving calabash dishes than did Tenemi. In less
than half an hour the dish was ready to be placed on the
high platform where the maripa nuts were drying. With
the sun upon it, the calabash would turn a deep cream color,
but where the knife had borne down, it would show a golden
brown, and where the glass had scraped away the pulp,
the color would be a paler gold, so pale that it would be
almost the cream of the unornamented outer surface.

"The large closed gourds are not done fast. Those are
carved on the outside, and must be worked cleverly. But
this does not take long. I am making this for you. When [431]
it is finished I will bring it to you. You must give it to your
girl-child when she grows big."

She herself had made four children, but only two of 165
them were living. The oldest, a daughter, carried a child
in her womb. Tomorrow she would come to the village,
and Tenemi would bring her.

"She was afraid to come. Women who are with child [843]
must be very careful."

84 It appeared that nothing in a woman's life was so dreaded
85 as childbearing, nothing more coveted than fertility, and no
time so difficult and so anxious as when a woman was
rearing her children.

782 "The day before a girl marries she prays all day to her
584 gods," said Dida, who with Fenekonde and several other
women had joined us. "I begged my god Kesekia and gave
him rice and rum. All day they played the agida. I begged
[842] him not to hate my husband. I begged him to give us
children."

843 When a woman conceived, her husband made her many
[831] obias, and especially a black sack obia with four cowries
751 sewed on it, to keep her safe on the paths which led from
789 village to village, and from village to her field. The fear
of the power of bad magic at this time was so great that, if we but looked at one of the pregnant women, or let our eyes rest on the several obias she wore, she grew nervous, covered them with both her hands, and disappeared in fear that the very power of our glance might weaken the potency of the charms. She did not believe in the white man's magic, but she was not in a condition to wish to put it to a test.

844 "When her time comes, a woman sees to it that she is in
782 her own village," said Fenekonde. "It is not good to give
birth in the bush, or on the river."

This had almost happened to Wilhelmina with her last child. She was on the river alone in a boat. Chief Sungi of Dahomey met her and called on his gods to delay the coming of the child until he brought her home. He had strong obia, and so the misfortune was averted.

When the woman felt the first labor-pains, she prayed to the gods, and to her personal spirits. On the great Sky God she called, and the Earth Mother; on her ak'a, her soul; on the Yorka, the ancestors; and then she prayed to her personal gods, and particularly to whatever snake gods she might have, for some of these were known to be jealous of a coming child. But none of the gods dared be slighted.

"Before she begs the gods, she is seated on a mat, or on 844
cloths. Over her head a white cloth is thrown. The woman 789
who is there to look after the coming of the child takes a calabash with water. Then she throws the water on the ground where the woman is seated. She begs the great gods, and the ancestors, and the woman's soul, and the woman's gods.

"When the pains come, she ties a cloth about her belly 844
tight, tight, until it hurts. The woman who helps her gives her some water if she wants it, and she presses down on the belly and makes the cloth tighter and tighter, until the child comes. The cord is cut with a knife."

The knife was the same as the kind they used for cicatrizing, and the after-birth was buried behind the house, in a [412]
small hole into which food and a piece of the sacred sangrafu wood was thrown.

"The child is washed, and then *pemba*—kaolin—is put on its forehead, and after that the mother and the child [751]
bathe every day and then wash in pemba. Sometimes a moon comes and wanes, and another comes, and the mother still puts the white on herself and on her child."

But if the birth proved to be difficult, then the husband 845
was told, and he besought his own ancestors and his own gods to help his woman and child.

"If the child doesn't come, then it's a bad spirit. Then they call the obia man."

When a woman had difficulty, everybody was troubled about it. If a woman had been unfaithful to her husband and had not confessed it, it would be that which would be killing the child in her womb, and killing her as well. Sometimes it was *wisi*—black magic—and everybody [754]
wondered who had sent it to their village. Sometimes it was a god who was envious.

"If it is a god, then, when the woman is strong again, 845
she goes to a more powerful god and buys from him the 776
next child to come into her womb. The strong god sees to 842
it that the jealous one finds no way to harm the child." [766]

What happened when a child was born dead?

845 The women had spoken with greater and greater re-
966 luctance about troubled births and now moved uneasily.

"You must not ask this," said Dida, rising. "Never talk about such things to young women."

Not until later, when Fenekonde and Tenemi were left alone with the white woman did they talk about birth customs again.

When a child died at birth, a hole was dug somewhere in the family quarter, or just outside it, and the child was buried there. There was no wake, no mourning. All those who had been living in the house where it died found other quarters, and for a month the house was washed with obia water. But if this had occurred before to the same mother, they would break the house where the child was born and would cast the pieces into the unhallowed bush. Some people on the river even broke it down at the first occurrence. There were never any wakes for very small children.

961 "Children die because they are bad spirits come in the
845 form of a child. When they do not stay, we know it is a bad
996 spirit. When the house is broken, they do not know their
way to come again."

"What if a woman died?"

845 This was whispered so softly that only Fenekonde heard
966 it, but she did not conceal her distaste for the question.

"When a woman dies she is put in a flat coffin. Some villages give her no coffin at all. Weeds are put into her eyes. All the girls in the village wash their eyes with obia weeds and water. They must never see this again. There is no wake. There is no dancing. No guns are shot. They break the house, and throw it after the coffin, as the men carry it away. She must not come back again."

But the white woman must not imagine that all deliveries were difficult. Often a woman bore a child, and, when the after-birth came, she herself rose and bathed and washed in pemba.

551 A child was given many names. Even in early childhood four or five names were not too many. There was the day

name which was kept secret and never spoken except in 551 states of possession or when the obia man called on a person's spirit. For girls, Amba for a Saturday child, Affi for one born on Friday, Adjuba for Wednesday; and for the boys some of the names were Kwaku, for Monday, Yao for Thursday, Kofi for Friday, and Kwasi for Sunday. Then there was the name which the father gave, and after that any of the family who cared added a name and made the child a present.

From the day it was born until it was at least two years 853 old a child fed at its mother's breast. For twelve moons 846 and five more of this time the woman could not go to the hammock with a man. It was then that her husband went to the distant French shore to work or to the railhead. But after seventeen months of nursing were past, he came back. 844

"If a child is made before a woman gets back her men- [842] strual flow, then it is a god. It is Kesefu. A child born feet [845] first some call Agosu, and some Asaeng. The child born after twins we call Dosu, and twins are Hohobi. Now it is in your book. You will give those names to your children, and your sister's children. No one will know at all what names these are. No one will be able to harm them."

6

In the quarter immediately adjoining that of the Gran- 585 man there was great activity. Six or seven men and boys 476 were at work on a new house, for the youngest daughter of the family was ready for marrying, and now the men were helping her suitor to build a house for her in her village.

From the same quarter, behind a house which stood in 304 the shade, came the laughter of young girls. We made our way past the house and saw four girls ranging in age from thirteen to sixteen seated on a log. One of these held her head back, and an older girl was bending over her. They called to us as we passed.

"We are cutting kamemba. Do you want some cuts, too?"

These were not new cuts which were being made, for with perhaps one exception, the girls were all nubile, and

304 the first cuts had been made on their faces long before they reached adolescence. When a girl began her monthly visits to the house which stood alone to one side of the road, directly opposite the shrine to the great gods, then it was time for the important cuts on the thighs, and it was the old women who made the cuts. But the reopening of old cuts, like the braiding of the hair, was a task the girls did for each other with enjoyment. It was with no small pride that they talked of their ornamental cuts.

The older girl held in her hand a razor from the white man's city. It was not very sharp, and the tropical dampness had spotted it with rust. Beside her was an old calabash holding charred rice hulls which had the moment before been rubbed into a powder, and a cloth whose color was rapidly being lost in the blood which flowed from the wounds which she cut.

Before proceeding with the cutting, the older girl would look critically at the girl on whom she was working, narrowing her eyes quite in the manner of an æsthete who was evaluating each detail. Then, with a firm grip on her razor, she would take an old scar between two fingers, and cut into it. Scar after scar she reopened, as the girls talked and laughed, until when she had made perhaps ten cuts, she would stop to staunch the blood and to survey her handiwork.

When the facial cuts were all open, it was time to rub [298] the powder from the freshly charred rice hulls into the wounds.

"She will be handsome, ai-yo!" said the girl as she finished, and she dropped the smaller cloth back into another calabash which held water. With this moist cloth dipped into the black powder, she rubbed the black on the face of the seated girl. Now when the scar healed, each of the keloids would show black and prominent against the brown of the skin.

"Mine have been reopened four times," said the girl whose face had been treated, as she rose to make way for the next one. "The cuts heal fast."

"It hurts, doesn't it?"

"*Ma kye!* It is beautiful. The men like it too much," 304
said the girls in a chorus, laughing at the suggestion that
the pain of the cuts would deter them from having them
made.

Sometimes, of course, the older girl admitted, the wounds
did become ugly. There was the girl from Godo, whose suitor
had kept bringing her more gifts because she was growing
handsomer and handsomer. She was all but ready for
marrying, when one of her thighs became infected after the
cuts. The wounds were so ugly that she could not even
wear the tunics of the grown girl. The family was sacrificing [782]
to all the spirits of the earth, begging them to heal the
wounds.

7

These days there were many visitors in the Granman's 535
village. There was the girl the Granman had summoned 574
to dance for his guests. She had, perhaps, that very summer
got her cloths, and her reputation as the best dancer on the
river had won for her a suitor who gave her many armlets [301]
and anklets. Her voice was fresh and flutelike in quality, [533]
and so fine that when she sang she placed a folded cloth over
her mouth, or danced with her head low. This was the way [916]
of modesty before people, and humility before the gods.

The women said, "Her spirits dance well," when they
watched her.

There was the large girl from a village down river who 882
came almost daily. She had the body of a woman, yet she 291
went about unclothed, and sometimes she appeared only
with a string about her waist.

"She is ready for *pangi*—cloths—ai," the women said,
"but her people do not want to give them to her yet."

They would not explain, however, why the attire of a
grown woman was denied her. We could only conjecture
about it. Perhaps she had no suitor. The man to whom she
had been promised might have died. There might be other
reasons.

882 "Perhaps the women were wrong. She may not be a
891 woman yet."

"*Ma kye!*" Angita exclaimed. It seemed he knew better.

And there was the woman Amasina. She wore as many armlets and anklets of brass as the shy dancer, as many as the wife of the bassia of S'ei, whom the gods had prospered. Her cloths were of the finest, and in colors which were most often of yellow and blue stripes, with a thread of black interwoven, and another of twisted red and white. She was good-looking, but in her manner there was no smoldering challenge and no undue reserve. With ease she went from one group to another, and the women treated her neither with too much familiarity nor with restraint.

609 Amasina felt at ease, too, with the white people. In the
bush they had an explanation for this feeling of well-being
with strangers. If a man and a woman were both born on
581 the same day, they did not get on very well together, for
they were both apt to have the same powers to grasp things
which came within the province of the gods who also had
come into the world on that day. Such a man and woman
would at once perceive each other's mistakes or would be
given to speaking continual warnings to each other. But
there were days which were especially congenial affinities
for marriages, and even friendships. These, we were led to
see, were days which represented a male and female deity
in the Bush Negro pantheon, whose mating had brought
well-being to themselves and the living world.

"You and Amasina like each other, ai," they said in the village, and this friendship had a sequel of importance for us.

776 One late afternoon we were sitting with the women talking about the gods. Dida said the white on her body was for her god Kesekia. Chief And'u had washed her for her god when he was here in the village, and tomorrow she would dance. Kesekia, she said, was a Vodu god, who had come to her from the French shore. When he came to her, he spoke tongues; he knew French.

796
776 "Tomorrow they will play the agida drum, and I will put a kerchief on my head tied so," she said, showing how she

would fasten it in back, letting the ends hang down, "and I will tie my breasts with another." She took a proffered kerchief, folded it into a triangle, and from the back brought the ends between her breasts and knotted them twice. 796 776

Amasina now joined us, and stood by listening.

They danced for Vodu gods on Sunday and Monday, and for the spirits of the bush on Tuesday and Wednesday. All the obia dances were held on Friday. All spirits had their special days, when they were worshiped and when they manifested themselves.

As we talked, each woman showed on her fingers how many gods she had. Dida had two other Vodu gods. Three fingers, two, three, four—hands went up with pride, but what the names of the gods were, they would not say, for if they called the gods, they would come. It was well enough for Dida to talk, for having the god it was not she who was speaking, but the god himself. Very possibly he was deciding to come to the white woman, for that was what gods did if they chose. Intermingled with this banter was some concern for their visitor if the god should decide to come to her. 776

Faced with the opportunity of coming by a spirit, the visitor asked to be made wise in the ways of the gods. What was the name of the Earth Mother? And the Mother of the River? And of that very important snake god called Papa who came to women only, because only women gave birth to children?

Amasina, who had seated herself beside the white woman, leaned over, and calmly spoke.

"I will tell you. The Earth Mother is Asaase, and Hene Tonugbwe is the name of the Mother of the River, and Towenu is the Papa god. Now do not ask more, and never speak these names to any one, unless you get the god."

Chapter XIII

THE GODS SPEAK

1

600 EARLY the next morning we heard the voice of a drum coming from some unidentifiable direction, not too close, not too far away.

"That's the agida drum we hear?" we asked Tenemi when she came to sweep the council house.

"Ai."

"It sounds far away."

"It's across the river. Dida is dancing. . . . "

But here she stopped, remembering, as we did, that she had agreed to come for us when Dida danced, if the god made Dida herself forget to fetch us to see her dancing.

"You can't take us to her, Tenemi?"

"It's across the river, and it's early."

"When did she leave this village?"

"Late last night."

As an after thought Tenemi added, "Dida has a house across the river. She went to her own quarter."

2

787 A few minutes later the white woman found herself walking toward the partially cleared ground outside the village, past the menstrual house and the open shrine to the great gods which stood almost directly opposite it. There were three women in the house, dressed in faded

cloths, their hair disheveled, their faces without the glint 787 which the oil gave to their dark skins, and their eyes without the touch of dark flame which the gleaming skins brought out. One of these women stood leaning against a doorpost trembling. Her hands were clenched, and her mouth moved without pause, and without sound.

"She hears the agida?"

"Ai. She wants to dance, but she can't. Her god is troubling her."

The white woman must not stop with them longer, and she must not come closer, the two women who stood beside their quivering companion called out at once, for the obia which she wore about her neck would be contaminated if brought too close to them, and its power to protect the wearer against danger would leave it at once.

"Do not come too close. Tomorrow I will return to my house, and after I have bathed and washed in pemba, I will be clean again, and then I will come to see you," the younger of the two women said.

The other said, "When you go there," and she pointed toward the woman's path, "do not go by the way of the broken calabashes. That is the unclean way. It is the path [841] for the women who stay in this house."

Down the clearing the white woman continued until, 343 when she turned, the open cooking shelter of Bassia Anaisi's quarter faced her. The floor of the shelter was of red clay, raised well above the clearing itself. A woman was laying a fire there, putting down the long sticks one end close to the other in the center, so that they radiated outwards in what seemed a perfect circle. Her child, who was fitted out with obias on neck and wrists and right ankle, sat [524] near by watching her, and playing with a gourd doll.

The voice of the agida had a moment before died down, 533 and now a song reached the white woman. It came not from across the river, but from somewhere directly behind the houses grouped about the clearing beyond the cooking shelter. The song was a repetition of several melodic phrases, sung in varying rhythms, so that it had a disturb-

533 ing quality as it continued slowly and yet more slowly for a time, then quickened sharply at irregular intervals.

533 "Who is singing?"

776 [372] "The gods," said the woman at the fire, without pausing to look up as she fanned the small flame with a woven fiber fan.

"Whose gods?"

"Amasina's, and the god of a woman of the G'aman's family. She got back from the menstrual house last night, and this morning when Amasina got her god, she got one, too."

"May I go and listen to the singing?"

"Yes."

But before the white woman had walked ten paces, she came face to face with Bassia Anaisi.

"I am going to your quarter, Bassia. The woman at the fire said I might go and listen to the singing. Is it all right?"

"Yes, go."

In a few seconds she came to a house before which several women were gathered. Outside its doorway calabashes stood in a curving line across the entire stretch of front wall, some filled with a dark liquid and others with rice, while directly in front of the door itself a dark uncorked bottle had been placed.

Down several paths came women, each with a calabash in her hand, and each as she reached the line of calabashes placed hers beside the others, and went into the house. The women entered singly and remained there but an instant, emerging with lines of white over their arms and bodies. What had taken place in the house while they were there it was impossible to tell, for the singing had continued without interruption.

Two voices were heard now. The voice which had carried across the clearing still intoned the word "Ondyi," while the other chanted in a soft and beautiful voice words which came without pause or harshness, except for a strange hissing sound which issued from somewhere inside the house.

"May I come closer?"

THE GODS SPEAK

"Yes, move closer." 533 776

The white woman now went toward the open door, 342
and through it saw a little of the inside of the house. Like
all Bush Negro houses, it had no windows of any kind,
and what light there was came from this low open doorway.
Near the door sat the woman who belonged to the family of
the Granman. In her hand she held an egg-shaped piece 787
of clay which she rubbed between her hands to the rhythm 533
of her song, and at intervals lifted first one hand, then the [302]
other, rubbing the white clay on her face and arms. The
thin layer of white over the dark of her skin gave to her
appearance in the dark house a strange color. She swayed
on her low bench as she sang, her body curving from her
hips first to one side, then to the other.

"Ondyi, ondyi," she sang over and over, and with the quickening of voice, she called "bonsu."

This word "Ondyi," the women explained, when they 787
urged the stranger to greet the god as was fitting, was the
greeting of the deity, the god's way of saying their everyday word "Odi."

The eyes of the woman at the door were half-closed as she sang, and she seemed dispirited, though with the quickened swaying she did rouse herself for an instant. She had no kerchief on her head, and none about her breasts.

"Her god hasn't got her very hard," the women said. "Go inside, perhaps when you speak with him, he will begin to stir. They want you to come in."

Into the house the white woman brought her bench, and sat down close to the possessed woman at the door. When she became accustomed to the darkness of the house, she saw a pair of eyes fixed on her from the farthest wall. The figure against this wall was so much the color of the house itself that it was not until a few moments had passed that the crouching form of an old woman was distinguishable. The old woman sat motionless, her eyes fastened on the stranger.

The white woman freed herself from the intent stare 787
of the old woman against the wall only when a sudden 776

787 776 hissing sound so startled her that she faced quickly about. Now two other eyes met hers. They belonged to a figure on a low bench, seated with its back to the door, facing the darkness of the unbroken walls, but with head turned to watch the stranger. The figure was in white—tunic, cloths about the breasts and on the head, arms, throat, and body, all were white. But of a greater whiteness yet was the terrifying, macabre face in which the line of the mouth alone, and the living black of the eyes, showed. Beside this white figure stood a streaked glass tumbler, filled with a whitish liquid. This tumbler had been at the lips of the white form when the stranger turned to see where the hissing came from. Now that the glass was replaced, the whitened hands began kneading a piece of clay and rubbing face and throat and arms with the hands. While doing this, the body swayed and the voice chanted.

787 776 539
"*From the river I come,*
And I say to you all,
Greetings.
All you Negroes,
Be greeted.

From the river I come,
I say to the white woman,
Greetings.
I say you came as a friend,
I say you came not for evil.

From the river I come,
I say to you all,
Be greeted."

Now the first woman moved closer to the stranger and put her arms about her, streaking her with clay.

"*Ondyi, Ondyi-o!*
I am Affi
I am Kantamasi-o!
Ondyi, ondyi,

THE GODS SPEAK

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[539]

Woman, I care for you,
I will be your god."

There was consternation among the women who stood outside listening. The Akantamasu god was one of the strongest on the river. He ranked only slightly under the great obia spirits, which the Sky God when creating the world had sent as wisdom for the living to combat the capricious lesser gods, and humans who were dominated by evil spirits. Differing from the obia spirits, however, who befriended the living, and brought healing to them, the Akantamasu god was an avenger, surpassed alone by the yorka, the ghosts, who avenged by killing instantly when they chose, while the Akantamasu god killed more slowly.

But there was concern for the possessed woman, as well. She had spoken the name Affi, her day name, the name [551] which summoned her soul. When not in a state of possession, she would never have spoken it before a stranger, except in a whisper to an obia man who came to cure her, or to a diviner to whom she came to ask why her soul was troubled.

Presently the white figure rose, breaking the tension, and, chanting, went from the hut into the clearing. Affi and the white woman followed. In the light of the clearing, a faint resemblance could be seen in the grace of the body of the figure in white to the pleasant Amasina. Of the brown of her skin, only the ankles and feet showed.

Both of the possessed women began pacing back and forth in the clearing, in time to the rhythm of their songs, but while Amasina danced with an easy stride, Affi shook and quivered and moaned.

"When the gods come, we do not speak. We sing. The speech of the gods is song. So it is," one woman whispered. [533]

Another said, indicating Affi, "Her god troubles her. She gave you a strong god. Are you afraid?"

"When the god comes to you, you will speak tongues. Now you have two gods. When Kesekia comes to you, you will sing Kesekia songs, you will dance to him."

787 When a male snake god came, then it was easy to know,
776 the women said. If the possessed one rolled face downward it was a male god, and he was courting the spirits of the earth, but if face upward then it was a female snake. "*Na muye opo-i-mbe gi 'a tapu*—The woman opens her womb for the sky," they said, using the precise image for one who was being wooed by the spirits who lived above.

3

123 When the white woman was about to enter the council house, Granman Yankuso called to her. He was standing in front of his house, surrounded by women, who were talking to him in low, excited voices.

"*Bak'a muye*—White woman," he said, looking at her searchingly, and saying nothing. "White woman," he repeated, after a short silence, "white mother, good morning. Are you awake?"

His voice sounded a little troubled, but not unfriendly. It helped the white woman to regain her self-possession.

"They sing well down below, Granman," she said, and went into the council house.

4

787 Whatever Granman Yankuso thought of the white
[123] woman's having witnessed the possession of the women of his village, he did not refuse permission to her and her husband to return to the hut.

Amasina and Affi were still in the clearing, dancing to their own songs. Women came up with their children, bringing more and more calabashes of rice. Amasina took up each child in her arms, and caressed it gently, streaking it with the white clay as she did so, and singing the while,

[539] "*I come from the river.*
You shall be cooled,
You shall be well."

Affi's moaning had become more and more faint, and her pacing, by this time, was listless. Her god would not take

her into his power strongly enough to give her the release 787
she craved.

Amasina sang,

"I come from the river.
I tell all you people,
This man, this woman
Are friends.
They come not for evil.

Go to the G'aman,
Say to him.
These people are friends,
They bring us no evil."

[539]

Then her god, speaking through her, sang an explanation to the white people. From the river he came, bringing healing to all those who were fevered, caring for all those who were sick. Those who could, came to him, but those who could not come, he would visit and bring them healing. Now he must make the round of the village, go to the houses, and see those who were ill.

Singing, Amasina beckoned us to follow her, and as she led the way she danced in undulating steps from one end of the village to another, visiting the sick, singing the cure her god was bringing them in the words he was speaking through her.

The white people could stay with her no longer. Word came that the boat which was to take them across the river to the village of the Granman's father was ready, and they must go. The women suggested, however, that if the whites cared to make a gift to the god who had spoken so well of them, it would be acceptable, and they hurried to their stores to get a gift. [123]

As they passed the council house and turned toward the small hut behind it where their supplies were kept, they heard a new sound. It was a choking sound, torn from an unwilling throat. Seated quite alone on a low stool in front

787 [412] of the mortar in which she had been pounding maripa nuts was the Granman's younger wife. The pestle had fallen from her shaking fingers. She gave the intruders no attention, for she, too, was possessed by her god,—by Toné, god of the river.

"*Ke-ke-ke-ke-ke-ke! Ke-ke-ke-ke-ke-ke!*" The syllables fell from her and, as the white people stood by, her shaking stopped, the sounds did not go on. Then they began again, her body racked, her voice choked. The Toné people do not speak when they are possessed, it is through sounds such as these that the god of the river makes known his wishes.

Women came running toward us. "Your boat is ready, Bak'a," they said.

787 431 123 The whites returned with the bracelets to find that the two women to whom they brought their offerings had come as far as the Granman's quarter of the village. Affi's greeting of "Ondyi!" had died down to a whisper. Disconsolately she followed Amasina, who, in the white cloth which reached almost to her ankles, looked tall and sinuous, and moved as though there were something in the still air to send her body curving to one side and to the other.

As the possessed women and those with them entered the quarter, the elder wife of Yankuso came toward Amasina with a large calabash of rice.

"All those who have the same god come with gifts. Amasina has the strongest god of all. It is a white god," a woman explained.

[822] White was the color for the ancestors, and hers was the god of a great priestess of the family. It was the god Towenu, the great Papa god, the giver [illegible] children, the jealous one, who came to her. If he cared for his priestess too well, he allowed her no children. The mention of his name the day before had brought him, and, coming, he vouched for the friendliness of the strangers.

Amasina put her arms about the older woman as she had done to the others who came to her. She sang once more her message:

787

"*Wife of the G'aman,* [539]
I come from the river.
Go to the G'aman
Say to him,
These strangers are friends,
They bring no evil."

It was the god speaking, and the Granman's wife received with lowered head the words spoken through the priestess.

"Ai, my master. Ai, Massa Gadu," she said.

5

The Granman's paternal village was directly across the 361
river from Asindopo Lantiwe. It was called Akisiamau, 643
literally "Took with an outstretched hand," but whether there was also some meaning in the phrase not intended for the uninitiated, we could not learn. In size it was not much larger than the Granman's village, and again and again we recognized houses which were his by the crest-like [423]
carvings on the doorposts, that reproduced the design found not only at the side of the council-house door, but at the door of all other houses at Asindopo Lantiwe which were his.

Except for several old people who sat about in the shade 123
and waited for the strangers to come to them with their greetings, the entire village followed us as we made our way down one path and another.

"*Bak'a, Ame'ika Bak'a, Ame'ika Fandya!*—White man. American white man, American Fandya!" the children called after us, as they ran at our heels, touching our canteens, our sun helmets, and shoes.

The Granman had spoken with especial fondness of his 342
father's house, and it was there that we asked first to be 643
taken. It was not occupied, we were told, and none might enter it. Above the top crosspiece white cotton was draped. Except that its door was closed, it showed no signs of being

342 643 uninhabited. Its posts and walls and thatch were in excellent condition, and there was not even the weather-beaten appearance about it of a house which had been closed for some time. Nor had it the kandu, the spiritual lock of unoccupied houses.

178 346 To one side of this house was the open shrine to the great gods, the pole to the Sky God, the smaller one with a checked tunic across the middle of it for the Earth Mother. But there was also a figure of wood with a broad white cloth hung from it like a flag, and this, the villagers said, was the image of the Granman's father. When the dead man's spirit came to the village, it was this image he animated. In times of need and on days fixed by ritual, it was to this image that prayers and food were brought.

Some distance from this shrine, standing close to the uncleared bush, was a house that had been deserted. Half of it the great bush had already reclaimed. The thatch of the roof and one entire side wall had altogether disappeared, and in place of these were garlands of leafy vines, so closely interwoven and so brilliantly green in the sun as to give to the asymmetrical mass of weathered grayish palm, and the strangling green, a strange beauty. Not quite two years ago it had been abandoned, and soon it would be completely lost to the bush.

But the villagers looked the other way when we photographed it.

A little to one side of the house with the doorposts which showed the Granman's crests was a smaller hut, before [789] whose door stretched a magic azang of palm fronds that marked it as a shrine.

[776] "This house is for the Apuku gods," said an old woman who heard our inquiry. "It belongs to me. It was built when my god told me to make it."

And without hesitation she led the way under the palm fronds through the opening.

This was the first time we had been permitted to enter a closed shrine. We had had descriptions of shrines from men with whom we had talked of the gods. There were some,

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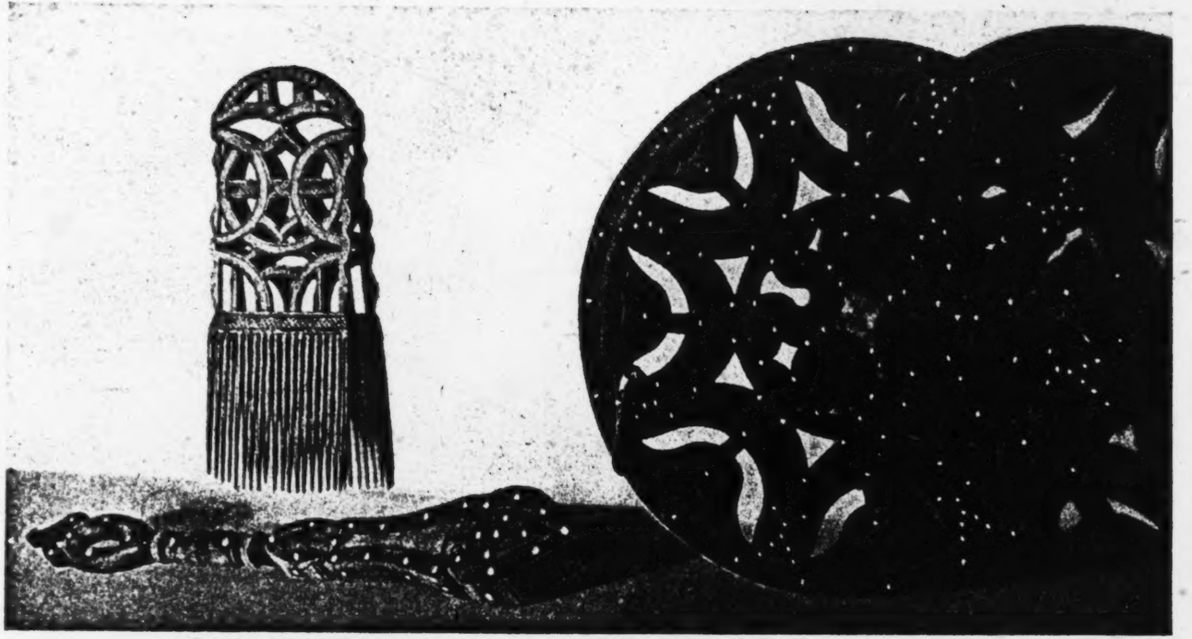

Carvings the women were eager to have admired: comb; clothes beater; tray.

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they told us, though never willing to name the villages 778 where they stood, whose walls were most elaborately 346 ornamented with symbols marked in red and black and [531] white, the three sacred colors which appeared on the stools and which the men used for painting their faces and bodies for the dances. On the upper river we had been told that these shrines were in the villages below, and on the lower river it was always intimated that it was up above where the great shrines stood. We had been told of stools which were whitened with sacred pemba, and blackened with soot in the *Fa'aka Pau* houses—the houses of the ancestral [769] spirits—and of the covered whitened vessels which were in the Vodu and Apuku houses, the shrines for the bush and snake deities, placed there for the spirits when they chose to animate them.

So we found it in this house dedicated to the spirits of the bush.

The hut was narrow and long, with walls of woven palm, and a floor made of hard smooth clay into which bare feet had nevertheless worn grooves. To one side of the door stood a drum of the type called *tumao*—the long drum. [534] It was cylindrical, and narrowed but slightly toward the bottom. White clay had once covered it, but now there were irregular lines of white marking the cracks in the wood.

On the other side of the door, against the same wall, lay several large balls of clay. These the old woman was keeping 887 for the obia pots she would make from time to time. Among 778 the Negroes of the town as well as in the bush, these black pots, made by women of the bush, were held to have great 323 magical potency.

"I never make too many pots at once," the old woman said. "I make them for myself as I need them and for the young people of the family." A woman who had not passed her period of childbearing could not make them. "Obia pots are things for old, old women. I cannot tell you about making them."

Leaving these lumps of clay, the woman led us farther 778 into the enclosure, until we stood in front of a raised altar 346

778 of earth which filled the rest of the hut. In the left-hand 346 corner was a covered whitened vessel for the god called Kentina Dagowe. This Kentina Dagowe was a deity who was the offspring of the Dagowe snake, and the Apuku god 776 of the bush whose name was Kentina. In him, as in so many 778 other of the spirits, we found exemplified the Bush Negro's concept of the world which held that the gods mated as did humans, that all which stirred and had life came into [873] being by such matings.

Other spirits also came to this house, the woman went on. Mundewaya, another of the bush gods, was worshiped at the white-covered pot in the opposite corner, while beside it lay the vessel to which the spirit of a third might come. This one was the most powerful of all bush gods, and his name was Danhowao. There were other objects on the platform. Two stools, daubed with sacred clay, had their place there, and in the center was an image of wood, a rounded pot set on a base that tapered from the ground toward it, and this was to the Nanai, the ancestors.

The old woman said, "For the Apuku gods, we only play the tumao drum. The Apuku are mostly women's gods, but some men have them, and the men who have them play the drums. When the god comes to you, then if you are not [888] too old you dance. But we old women do not dance. When the god comes to me, then I begin to shake. I go into this house on the day we call him, and they play the drum. Then I talk to the god. If I have something to beg of him for myself, or for someone else, then I put the pot which [787] belongs to him on my head, and the drum calls him. When my body begins to shake, then it is the god. He has come, and when I speak it is not I but the god speaking."

776 From the clearing the talk of those who had remained 609 outside came through the thin woven walls of the shrine. [203] From one to another we could hear the news spread that in the village of the Granman across the river the gods had spoken for the whites.

In the hut, we listened to the old woman inside whose shrine we stood.

"The openings in the wall there," she explained, when 778
we asked her about the two squares cut into the wall 346
behind the altar, "are for all things that fly. In this place
they must come and go as they like. Bats come here, and [825]
insects of all kinds, and when they want to go back to the
bush, they must be able to go as they like. That is the wish
of the gods. So they told us long ago."

6

We were led from house to house. The gods had spoken. 574
We were friends, and as friends who came not to harm, we 609
were given the hospitality of friendship. There were other 123
shrines, but we did not have to ask about them. They were
pointed out to us with the other sights of the village.

The closed low hut near the Apuku shrine we had entered 778
was to the river god Toné. It was a very small enclosure, 776
and before it was a plant which covered the low entrance. 346
It belonged, we were told, to an albino woman who was
possessed by Toné. But she was not in the village now.
Farther down the path was a larger house, another shrine.
This had a piece of iron over the door and, when we asked
about it, the girls who were following us ran, and the men
merely said that it was the place of the Kromanti obia and
passed on.

As we continued on our way, each woman was anxious 352
not to have us slight the house her man had built her or 353
fail to admire the carvings that were inserted into the weave
of the palm walls. The huts were swept clean—the cleanliness
of the entire village was even more striking than that [356]
of others we had visited—and but for a few stools, which
were brought out for the strangers while they spoke with
the old people who lived in the quarter, they were entirely 353
bare. In every house, however, there was sure to be a shelf, 531
large or small, or several shelves, on which stood prized
food trays with carvings which covered both inner and outer 415
surfaces. Combs and food stirrers were taken down and
shown us, and the calabash dishes made by the women

353 themselves, and the blade-like pieces of gourd which they
531 used for spoons, and which bore the same symbols as the
415 dishes.

"Our men make fine things here in the true, true
462 Saramacca," Dida said when we entered her quarter, and
531 sat in her house. "Look at the carvings I have."

Her body was still white with pemba. Her manner was still a little vague.

"Did you dance this morning?"

"Ai."

"We heard the agida drum play when we were in the
776 council house of the Granman."

787 "Ai, Kesekia is a big god. When he comes, his voice is strong."

But she showed no willingness to talk, and we could tell by the repeated twitching of her body that she had still to dance to her god. Leaving her we continued up the path toward houses we had not yet visited. The white man, with a man who was guiding him and the bassia from Asindopo Lantiwe, walked ahead, while the children crowded about the white woman who was giving them safety pins which they at once put in their hair.

778 "There is the Vodu house," said the man who acted as guide, and he led the way through the low doorway into
346 the hut.

Inside, though smaller than the shrine to the gods of the bush, it differed from it but little. It had the same clay floor, the same raised altar on which stood stools washed in white clay, and several covered, whitened vessels, an image, and the round balls of clay.

"May I go closer and look at the image there?"

"Yes, go."

[352] The stools resembled those in ordinary use, but whatever
design they may have had was obscured by the white clay
which covered them. The vessels were not unlike those in
[415] the other shrine we had visited or those which rested on the
heads of village gods which stood under low, roofed-over
shelters on the main village paths. Turning, the white man

stepped from the raised platform ready to leave, when he noticed a drum which stood in a corner near the door of the hut, and reached almost to the thatch. 778 346

We had seen many agida drums during our stay in the Saramacca country. Some of them had been half as tall as a man—a round hollowed trunk of a tree, with wooden pegs in the side on which the drumhead was fastened. The agida had no elaborate tuning device such as the other drums carried, and on it was neither the beautiful carving with which the apinti was decorated, nor the white pembadoti of the tumao. The agida was the deep bass voice of every trio of drums which played for the sacred dances, and whatever other rhythms were struck on it, its steady note set the beat about which the more incidental rhythms played. We had been told what seemed fabulous tales of the size of some of these agida drums, but not until we saw the drum which stood in the corner of this shrine to the snake gods did we realize how large they might be. 778 534

The white man glanced about him. The rest of the party had not yet caught up. In the dimness of the shrine there were only the three men. He stepped up to the enormous drum.

"May I tap it?" he asked.

Reaching up, his arm outstretched above his head, he stood on tip-toe before his fingers found the taut head and gently drummed a rhythm there.

"It is large. It must have a deep voice."

"It is a big drum. Would you like to hear it? The man who plays it is near by."

Now there were four in the hut. The drummer spoke.

"Do you want to hear the drum, white man? I will play it if you are not afraid. But if I play, I will call the god, and when I call him he will come. Shall I play the drum?" 778 533 776

The white man asked that the god be called.

The bassia beckoned to the white woman to come, and signed to the others to remain outside. Framed in the low doorway, shutting out the glare of the sun-swept clearing, were the crouching bodies of women and children who

778 peered into the inner darkness, the whites of their eyes
533 moving with the movements of the strangers.

Gently the drummer laid the great cylinder of wood flat
776 on the ground, and from the thatch took down a hard-wood stick, dark and smooth with use. The drum filled more than half of the wall near which it lay. Stooping, the drummer began to call the Vodu gods. It was the rhythm we had heard from across the river early in the morning. The drumming had sounded low and distant then, but in this small enclosure the volume of sound was deafening. It seemed to be pushing against the yielding woven walls, pushing outwards and up.

The rhythm was disturbingly irregular. There was, in the sense of the steady rhythms of the dances, no rhythm at all, and this uncertainty of beat added to the volume of sound racked the listeners. When we thought we heard a repetition of an interval, a sudden change in tempo brought us up with a start. On and on the man struck the drumhead, sounding the heavy beats with the stick, while with his free hand he kept up a running fire of obbligato to the message for the god.

The heads in the doorway began to move nervously this way and that as the message to the god continued, when suddenly they disappeared behind someone who was coming at a run. A moment later Dida was in the hut.

787 She was again possessed. Her body shook with the intensity with which she experienced her god, and her eyes glowed with a steady fire. Back and forth she paced, and when the drum had sounded, she addressed herself to it, listening for its voice and answering, listening again and answering in tones which grew more and more harsh. Then she turned to us, and began to chant

[539] *"I am the god Kesekia*
From back of the prison,
From the French shore,
I come.
I am the god Kesekia."

Once more she resumed her frenzied pacing, and from time to time as the drum spoke she whirled about and replied. Now and again she would repeat the phrases which the bassia said was the French snake god speaking—"Ti donc!" "Kesifo, kesifo!" "Ti donc!" 787

"Speak to the god," said the bassia. "Speak to him in the French tongue. He will answer you."

In spite of the bassia's urging, we stood silent, for it was crowded in the little hut, and Dida's god was not as genial a one as was Amasina's. Her body shook and quivered, her pupils were dilated, her voice became harsher as she turned to us with her hissing cries.

"Ti donc!

"Kesifo!

"Ti donc!"

For a moment, the god had done speaking on the drum. Gently the stick tapped against the wood, and the drummer's left hand was quiet. Then once more the roaring note began, and as the heads disappeared from the doorway, a second form shot inside.

A young woman entered. She had no white on her body, as had Dida, nor was there any kerchief on her head or about her breasts. When the drum sounded she had been in her house seeing to her small infant, but hearing the agida speak the words of the Vodu god, she could not hold back longer, for her god came into her and sent her to the shrine.

Now there were two who paced inside the enclosure, calling their answers to the drumbeats, until once more the steady tapping of the stick on the wood took the place of the strokes on the drumhead, and the second woman sang: 787 539

"*Maumbe-wa,*
Maumbe-o,
Father Manga
Father Maumbe. [533]
God Maumbe-wo
God Malimbe, Dagowe.
Tutu calls, ye-o

789
539
[533]

Tutu calls, ye-o.
God is there in the river alone,
God Tutu calls,
Ye-o, yo."

787 So the young woman sang as she paced, her body twitching and quivering, while Dida repeated her exclamations. The man again took up his invocation to the gods, then resumed the soft tapping against the wood.

He said to us as he tapped, "My own god is Agida Wenowa. She is a Vodu god, and when I dance I put a parrot feather in my hair. When I play the agida, then all Vodu gods come. The agida is the drum for the Vodu gods."

As he spoke to the slow beating, yet two more figures came crowding in. We had been so intent on the two possessed women and on what the drummer was telling that, not until these new arrivals were at our side, did we notice them. One of them was Affi, the other Amasina. They were as we had left them, Amasina still in her white tunic and kerchiefs, her face and upper body yet more thickly coated with white so that only the eyes were alive, Affi still a grayish color, still anguished.

"We heard the voice of the god. We came."

But there was no longer room in the small shrine for the women to dance. The beating of the stick became fainter and fainter; the drummer no longer touched the skin which topped the drum. Fainter and fainter still came the beat, until the young woman who stood there without white on her body shook herself, as though she were coming awake. For a moment, all was quiet.

"He is gone."

"The god is gone."

"He has released her."

The drummer put back his stick. Slowly he lifted the drum; gently he stood the agida upright in its corner.

7

776
609 In the Granman's council house, voices of people standing outside reached us. From one to another the news was told.

THE GODS SPEAK

The gods of the river had carried the whites in safety up the rapids, and the gods of the sky had, at the moment of their landing, brought rain to cool the earth and sent thunder to speak the greetings from on high. This morning a great snake deity and the god of the ant hill had declared that the strangers carried no evil for the people of the Saramacca. Across the river they had been in the shrines, and the great agida had spoken. They had not been harmed, even though strong Vodu gods had come. 776 609

Inside the hut, we listened. We did not know the decision of the Granman's krutu, but the gods had spoken. This day, in any event, could not be changed.

Chapter XIV

GRANMAN MOANA YANKUSO

I

114 WHATEVER the rôle of the great man in the life of a people, there are names whose very mention bring up almost full-bodied an epoch, a great dynamic sweep of human thought and activity, of achievement, and sometimes of disaster. Perhaps the great individual does not exist until the poetic vision of a people gives to the skeleton of a name the flesh of a godhead. From earliest times and from people of varying civilizations have come down tales of these godheads, created, let us say if we like, out of a psychic need in the life of human beings to exalt personality in order that, imaginatively at least, the chasm between desire and insufficiency might be spanned.

643 159 In the council house of Granman Yankuso, as we listened to his stories, these thoughts constantly recurred to us, and it is not strange, therefore, that now as we try to collect images and impressions of the man for an objective picture of him not only as a Bush Negro but as an individual, we think of him as typifying among the Negroes of the Saramacca today such a name and such a personality.

Already Moana Yankuso was something of a myth among the people of the coastal region and among his own people.

Men on the coast said, "Granman Yankuso is a silent
[159] man. You will be with him for days, and he will never utter a word."

GRANMAN MOANA YANKUSO

"Granman Yankuso is the tallest man on the river, and 643
the darkest," they said. "He speaks little. When he is 159
angry, his growl strikes terror in all who hear him." 157

People said, "The Granman is a clever man. You can tell him about your work in the way you would speak to your own educated men, and he will understand you."

"They will take away everything you have up there on the river."

"They will never bring you to the Granman. He will see to it."

In the villages of the Saramacca country we heard again and again proverbs he had originated, which were quoted when men told of this almost mythical personality.

"The Granman says, 'No one must die, but the burial [538]
place cannot lie idle,' " Bayo once quoted him.

"What does it mean, Bayo?"

"It is deep, white man. The Granman is wise."

Kasanya once quoted another of the Granman's prov-
erbs. "If the gods say take one step at a time, do not stand [538]
still, and take two steps the next time in anger."

On this river they told us that Granman Moana Yankuso knew all that went on. It was a kind of magic he had: whatever men did anywhere, he knew.

And they said, too, that men were afraid to cross him, not alone because of his rank, but because his spirits were strong.

2

It is difficult to be objective about Moana Yankuso. In 828
the terms his own people use, the explanation of his 643
personality would be the explanation given of any other.

"He has strong gods."

If we urged them to explain what were the gods of a man they were praising, they would describe the Tiger spirit the man had, and what knowledge of healing and future events his Opete obia, his buzzard spirit, gave him, and how he had come by a special obia which had passed down to him from a famous magician of the earliest times.

643 159 In our own terms, if we were to picture the Granman as a splendid savage, cheerful, guileless, childlike, flattered by our interest, we would be belying his gifts of sophistication, and he would thank us little for these romantic outlines which, according to the values of his own civilization, would be insulting.

829 [538] 776 The code of life among these people was expressed in the proverb we had heard often spoken. "There are men on the upper river, there are men on the lower river, too." For survival in this bush, a man needed to match his strength and his wits and his magic, his kindliness and his enmity against those of any other. And the Bush Negro is a realist, for, as we had seen, not even the gods could be depended upon to be consistent—consistently good or consistently evil. The Bush Negro's gods, like humans, often did things for unaccountable reasons, because of a momentary whim, because of a desire to try the untried.

829 181 It was good to be guileless, but sometimes a man had to be a tiger, had to stalk his prey from behind. It was well enough to be a tiger, but sometimes a man needed the cunning of the bush hero, spider Anansi, who knew how to outwit the tiger. It was well enough to be an eagle, and be free and fly high, but sometimes a man needed the wit of the little bird konubri, who became king of all birds, because, when in the kingdom of birds there was a contest for the throne, it was he who, by perching on the back of the eagle, flew highest of all.

643 159 In the simplest of our own terms, Granman Moana Yankuso could be said to be a superb politician. In his villages, marriage alliances were calculated with the nicety of the best statesmanship. Whatever his own views, he saw to it that he never defied the arbiters of magic or the clan of the seat of magic, the Dahomey people. Toward the women of strange villages who came to see the white man and his woman, he showed an easy gallantry, which could not have been but flattering. When addressing the women who carried children astride their backs, he would speak gently to them and call them "mother" in greeting, and

for the young girls he had the cavalier address of "wenki," possibly the English word wench under its seventeenth century connotation of young woman.

We had, thanks to the gods, perhaps, never seen him in the rôle of tiger, unless his parting krutu with the four Gankwe men could be said to symbolize its mood, if not its manner. To suggest that any full-grown Bush Negro—a man who had Kromanti—would be incapable, when need arose, of being the tiger, would, of course, be looked upon as the deepest affront.

But Moana Yankuso was more than an astute politician. Using our own values again, we admired his vitality, his dignity, his robust imagination, his wit. Perhaps what struck us particularly about him, when we came to know him in situations with his own people, was that here was a man who in intellect and will towered so much above those who were about him that he was a lonely figure. His age had become something of a myth, too. People said he was seventy, that he was more than that, that he was scarcely sixty. We had never seen his head without the covering kerchief, so that it was difficult to form any definite impression about his years. But in strength he was still a colossus, though it was not true that he was the tallest or the strongest or the darkest man on the river. His own son-in-law, Wilhelmina's husband, was perhaps a head taller than he, as was the drummer at Akisiamau, who had played the agida for us. We had seen him, cutlass in hand, clearing a path for us through the underbrush with amazing rapidity, as the courteous gesture of a host who wanted to insure our bathing in privacy. Had the underbrush been of papier-mâché, he could not have swung his strokes more surely or more tellingly.

Above all else, however, Granman Moana Yankuso was a magnificent talker, a fine story-teller. What we give of his conversations, and what incidents we describe, may suggest something of his personality. His full story will never be written.

3

643 "Tell me this," said Granman Yankuso to us one evening
159 when we sat alone with him in the council house, "why
186 is it that things have changed so in the city? I am not a
young man. For years I came to the city, and when I met
178 Negro women of the town going to market or coming from
market, they were dressed in full skirts. They looked well. Now the women dress in straight dresses like men. Straight up and down and short. They want to look like white people.

"Years ago when I came to the city, I used to hear Negroes laugh. It is good to hear laughter. Now they are trying to be like the whites. They do not laugh. That is not good. It would be better if white people laughed more, too.

"Why do Negroes want to turn into white people? Look, is my skin like yours? Is my daughter's hair like yours, white woman? If you put on a pangi, you will not look like my daughter. You, white man, are as tall as Captain And'u. If you put on a cloth over one shoulder, you will not look like And'u. . . .

"A man came to me in the city and said he wanted to go to Dahomey. He wore no obias. He was a white man's Negro. I said he couldn't go to Dahomey. The man said, 'Look, my skin is as black as yours.' 'Ai, but your heart isn't.'

"You know why I said it? There is your kind of magic, white man, and there is our kind of magic. White man's magic keeps men in cities, but here in the bush a man needs black man's magic to keep alive and black man's strength to go up and down the rivers.

"You white men have books. You read in books, and you know. I cannot read what men write, yet I can read in my own way. I meet a man, and I can read him. I look at him, and I know what he is thinking. Before he begins to talk, I know what he wants to say. What your ancestors knew they put down in books, and you read it. What our ancestors know, they tell us at night, they tell us in the cool of the

morning, they tell us when we call on them. That is the 643
black man's way. 159

"You white people have money, you have fine houses, 186
you wear clothes, you can count. They tell me that you 178
say in your books all people must be friends. But you have wars. If white people kill white people, then *mati*—friend—how will it be with black people living among the whites?" 648

Granman Yankuso rose, when he said this, and took from the chains of the suspended lamp a folded envelope. He handed it to us, and from it we took out a letter on the stationery of the League of Nations, signed by its Secretary, Sir Eric Drummond. As we were reading this, he left the council house and soon returned with a larger envelope, which he had kept uncreased, and from it brought out a photograph of the Council of the League of Nations in session. They were his proud possessions. While the World War lasted there was no work for the Bush Negroes on the river. They could not earn the money they needed to buy cloths for marrying and powder and rum for ceremonial
usage. The Bush Negroes called it a "great money famine," [731]
in the way of their Anansi stories which so often began with "This was a time of great famine." Through a missionary on the upper river, the Granman learned of the war, and through him later of the League, which the missionary had undoubtedly brought up as the white man's defense against the challenge of the black tribal head, who asked, "How will it be with black people living among the whites?"

It was then that the Granman through this same missionary addressed himself to the white rulers far away, telling of the fear of the blacks, and counseling them the wisdom of peace!

4

In the council house Granman Moana Yankuso was host 643
to the Gankwe men. They were there to take their leave of 684
him before starting down river. Asikanu, the handsome 574
brother of the Gankwe clan head, who was sent away from his village while the elders were deciding upon his adultery

643 684 579 [576] fine, sat between Sedefo, whose bench was moved forward a little, and Angita. The younger men sat with bodies half-turned toward the wall, out of respect for the Granman, the older ones, with their faces averted from him.

The Granman was speaking, telling a story.

643 684 538 "Ai, mati . . . " he said, in his precise, formal way, laying stress on each syllable, "in our bush, the gods be praised, men are men. There was a man near here, who saw a woman he liked, and he took her. He had a loving eye, he was young. Ai, mati, what is a beating to a man when he is young? But the proverb says, 'All that is in the darkness will come to light.' Dealings with women always come to light too soon. That man got a beating, mati! He came out into the clearing, his head held high, like any man whom young girls follow with their eyes. But waiting for him was the husband of the woman, and the men of his family, and. . . . "

"Well, so it is, G'ama'," said Sedefo, with the careful modulation which showed that he, too, was schooled in the way of the important councils.

"Ya-hai, G'ama'," said Asikanu, more briefly.

Granman Yankuso now went on with his story, bringing to his recital all the detail of the punishment of the adulterer, without quickening the telling of his story even when he spoke the words which described the sound of the blows.

"Yes, master of the realm," said Sedefo, his head still averted, but leaning his body forward a little as he spoke, so that he somewhat shielded Asikanu from the direct gaze of the Granman, yet managing this clever gesture so that it had the air of rapt interest.

"Kere-kere, G'ama'," Asikanu breathed, almost inaudibly.

As the Granman recounted his tale, Asikanu's spine twitched as though every blow mentioned was that instant being leveled at him, as though he himself were lying head down in the dust of the clearing, while blows rained down upon him, and the Kromanti iron bands cut gashes into his proud face and arms and body.

But Sedefo, splendid actor that he was, betrayed in no 643
way that he was aware of his friend's discomfiture, except 684
that his interpolations became more and more spirited, 538
balancing in the intensity of his voice the formality of the Granman's speech.

"True, true!" he said, with excitement.

"By Ando, G'ama'!"

When the tale was finished, the Granman became reminiscent. In his youth he had been like the rest. What did it mean to be a man and not to assert one's manhood when a handsome woman was to be had? He was on the Marowyne then. Did they want to beat him? He had said, "Very well." As many as wished could come at him—but one at a time.

As he spoke now, he clenched his fist and struck the table with it so that the table shook and the guns which lay underneath it rattled.

He was no longer young, but his answer to people who threatened would still be the same, he continued.

"Tell them that everywhere on the river, mati," he finished with a smile, and he cleared his throat as a signal for the bassia to come and pour out drinks for his visitors, [579] before they left his village.

And how was their clan head who had been ailing? he asked, with friendly solicitude.

5

Granman Yankuso was telling about his great ancestors. 643
He looked particularly well that night. His smock-like 292
coat was a deep blue, and over it was a print of orange and black worn toga fashion.

There was Bagida, one of the first to escape to the bush, 173
and Dosi who made the Kasito clan, and Ajako who was a Matchau Negro, a man of the Granman's own clan, and it was he who had fought against the whites and had freed his people. There were Mother Bedu, and Mother Fakia, and the great Abini family which bore Alabi, whom the peccary had helped to freedom, so that Alabi's people, the Awana Negroes, to this day did not eat pingo.

173 Alabi, as the Granman called him, was the Araby of history, the great rebel of whom Stedman, who campaigned against the Bush Negroes long ago, wrote.

"White man, Alabi did not know how to work gold, or to earn great wealth, but he had stories in his head." He had called the first black krutu. And from Alabi had come Danieh who built Gansee, which was even now one of the most populous villages on the whole river.

"Long ago in the bush here, we had men, Bak'a!"

There was G'ama' Okosu, a Nomerimi Negro, the leader of those men who had escaped to the swamps on the coast, instead of going into the bush, and whom the people were afraid to touch.

"G'ama' Okosu could change int[illegible]atta monkey when he liked. He could cross the river without a boat."

The Dombi Negroes had their man, too. He was Sabaku. He was leaving his people to run away from slavery. He was going into the bush. "If we do not meet again in life, we shall meet in death," he said. He had no boat in which to cross the river, so he went to Yank'o, the buzzard, and he asked him to carry him. "I have no home, O Yank'o," he said to the buzzard, "but I will get on your back, and there my home will be. You who fly high, who fly over water, and over the high bush, carry me to safety."

The Granman himself was part Dombi and part Matchau, he said.

[825] "That is why we do not shoot a buzzard. If we shoot him by accident, then we must say 'Many thanks.'"

There was Tata Wadia who opened up this bush, who was still sung about by the Negroes of the city when they invoked the Kromanti spirit.

"I have the stick which he used."

"Will you let us see it, Granman?"

"Gbolo!"

[126] "We will photograph you holding the stick, Granman, and when we show it in our country we will tell the story."

He nodded. But the photograph was never taken.

GRANMAN MOANA YANKUSO

6

The next night he told stories again. The talk was of Africa. 173

"Our first ancestor was Tata Sakotu. He came from God." Father Sakotu found himself alone in the bush. Day after day he wandered, and hunger was killing him. One day he came to a tree bearing the pongi fruit, but the fruit hung so high that he could not get it. Father Sakotu cried out to God, and said, "O God, you gave me life. Give me food that I may sustain the life you gave me." God came to him and said, he said, "Sakotu, break off a stick, and with the stick strike the branches of the tree, and the fruit will fall down." All that he knew Sakotu learned from God, and he passed it on to his children.

The Granman's story of wandering alone in the bush brought another to his mind.

"Did you ever hear about Captain Apatu?" he asked us. "He lived not so long ago. He was a man without fear. The French sent him to Pali (Paris) and wrote down in their white man's books that he was a great man. I will tell you his story."

Apatu was a Matchau Negro, a member of the Granman's own clan. He swore friendship with the Aluku people and went over to the French nationality and later tried to get the Granman's people to become French. This was how it came to pass.

"Apatu was a clever man. We say knowledge is not wisi, to want to know is not sorcery. But sometimes, when a man knows much, he has enemies, and trouble comes to him. This happened to Apatu. People on the river said he was a *wisiman*. He said to the people, when they drove him away and cursed him, he said, 'Give me one fig banana, and I will go. If I am guilty of witchcraft, let the whites catch me, and kill me.' He wore one obia on his arm which Tata Boni gave him. Tata Boni was a great obia man. He could walk on the water."

173 With this obia, and unafraid, Apatu went. He reached the French shore, and found work. Years later he was asked to guide an expedition against the Indians. They came to a cave. At the other end of it Indians waited with their poisoned arrows.

The French officer said to him, "Apatu, are you afraid?"

"I will go, I am not afraid of death," Apatu said to the officer.

He led the way through the cave, calling out, "Mafi, Yanku na'a, hi!"

Three times the Indians tried to shoot him, and each time they failed.

"The French officer gave Apatu a gold piece for saving his life. That was when they sent him to Pali, and it was written down that he was a great man," ended the Granman.

7

822 "Do you know what they asked me in the city when I was there?" the Granman said one day, when his elders assembled. "'Chief Yankuso,' they asked me, 'which is better, light or darkness?' I said to them, I said, 'Darkness is better. When it is day we work and we struggle. At night we go into our hammocks with our women, and we find peace.'"

He turned to us as he told the story.

"Is it not so, white man? You yourself are young."

8

123 177 A few days after the gods had spoken, the Granman asked us if we would that evening show the pictures of the country of the Negroes which we had brought. We had shown him earlier the simple projector, actually a flashlight with a lens attached, through which a roll of film passed to flash images, one by one, on a screen. On the film were photographs of illustrations from books on Africa.

Mechanical objects of all kinds fascinated these men of the bush, and they would ask again and again to see our flashlights or the inside of our phonograph. Though un-

willing to touch the phonograph, they never tired of hearing 123
about its mechanism and how it was that a voice was 177
recorded and instantly reproduced. But the mystery of the moment was this projector.

We had delayed showing these photographs as long as we 157
could, for what leads we could get to African survivals, we 123
sought, for many reasons, to get singly. Not the least of these reasons was that the Bush Negro, who knew the method of krutu, did not allow himself to be impulsive in new situations, especially if they involved strangers. If something unfamiliar was presented, he wanted time to think and to krutu about it with others of his kind. Memories of the early experiences of their people seemed always to be stirring to make the most genial man, or a very pleasant old woman, fall silent and resort to the phrase, "God alone knows." Men, in particular, and often women, too, seemed to be posing to themselves a mute, anxious question: Was it well for the white people to know so much about them? Even when whites came as friends, as the gods attested, was it well to speak that fraction of their knowledge which the ancestors permitted? For generations they had lived with the feeling that their deep, deep Saramacca language was their own, its knowledge the wisdom of their own people, and here were strangers, speaking to them in their own tongue more easily as day followed day. Was it well? Men taking a white man's boat up and down the river could say what they chose, and the white man who traveled with them did not understand. What if this were to end?

We were constantly made to feel the effect of these doubts in the minds of the people.

"They say here," said Fenekonde one day, "when you get back to your white country, you will have much knowledge to profit you. The two of you will be able to talk Saramacca, and no one at all will know what you say."

Other things were said.

"At the krutu they said, these white people might have been sent by others, as soldiers with toys."

123 177 "You must have strong obia from Africa—strong snake obia—for the gods to have spoken so well of you!"

But when the Granman asked, there was no refusing. That day word was sent to all in the village that the Bakra was giving a cinema show in the bush.

Long before dark the entire village had gathered in front of our doorway. The children had been around since early afternoon. Against the council-house wall we hung a white sheet, and some feet away we stood our folding table and on it the little projector. The show was about to begin.

[354] The Granman who sat a little to one side gave orders to the latecomers to extinguish the flames of their small oil lamps and their lanterns, and the large torch which he had so proudly shown that first night, and which had since illuminated the clearing nightly, was also extinguished.

The illustrations we had photographed were from volumes on the people of the West Coast of Africa—Ashanti and the Gold Coast, Dahomey, Nigeria, Benin, the Cameroons, Loango, and the Congo. Our first year's experiences among these people had taught us that it would not be well to show them too many ceremonial pictures. Photographs of sacrifices of animals other than fowls, we had felt, too, would not be wise to introduce. Such a picture as that of the Ashanti Sasabonsum, the "evil Apuku," as the Bush Negroes whom we had allowed to see the illustration named it, we had also decided should best be shown to individuals here and there. For the general showing, we relied upon pictures of cicatrizations, of hairdressing and teeth filing, of rafts floating on African lakes, of pottery making and cloth weaving, of laying fires and the doing of other household tasks, of carvings, and finally of one or two priests and priestesses in states of possession.

We waited for a signal from the Granman to begin. About [342] the dark clearing the huts, with their roof poles meeting on top like great horns, gave a strange effect to the scene, for with the moving and shifting of bare feet it seemed as though everything in that clearing strained to fall in line

with the white curtain hanging against the wall of the 123
council house. To one side was the image of the Sky God, 177
tall almost as the big bush which stood about the clearing, and beside it the pole for the Earth Mother. People went from one side of the improvised screen to the other, with no mental image to tell them where they should look or what they might expect to see. Something of fear went with their expectancy.

The Granman nodded, and the pictures began to appear.

"Mati, did you see how they lay the fire?"

"Mother of all Negroes, what great breasts the women have!"

"See them getting the cassava ready! Look, they use the bark for a container!"

"Master Nigger! They know something there in the land of our ancestors. Men know how to weave cloth!"

"See the braids. They are handsome in our ancestral land. The head looks like a carved calabash!"

"Massa Nengere! That's the way to take lumber down! Not one raft at a time, or two, mati. Four at a time. They are workmen there, I tell you! Our ancestors used to say there was wealth there!"

We had usually to tell them what the picture showed, for they had not the habit of looking at these images and would stand to one side, or bend low and look up at the screen. But once we named the picture—"This is the head of a woman," or "This is timber going down to the city," or "This is a path through the bush"—then it was they who began to describe aloud what they saw, exclaiming over the resemblance to their own paths, or to their own manner of burning pots, or to their own way of preparing food.

"Mati, friends," said the Granman, "here deep in the 177
Saramacca bush, all this has come to us. If I were a young 186
man, I would go and see what goes on in the world. I would go to Africa. White man, how much gold does a man need to go to Africa?" After a short silence, he continued this train of thought. "What shall be done? Shall we go see the world?

177 186 Here is our bush. Our gods are here, and our ancestors come at our call. There is the world—*na g'on tapu*. There is the land of our old ancestors."

He stopped and covered his face with his hands, remaining deep in thought. But when he spoke again, his voice was calm.

177 123 "Mati, let us see all that the white man has brought. Here deep in the bush, all this has come to us that even children might see. Let us see all."

On the screen appeared a priest. He wore a grass skirt used in a sacred dance, a skirt like the one we had had made for us here on the river, and his face was covered, mask-like, with white clay.

"Ai, mati," exclaimed the Granman, as everyone gasped at what they saw.

The next picture showed the same priest dancing. Two men held his arms.

"When Kromanti gets a man in the ancestral country, it comes so strong that he has to be held in check, friends. So it is here, too."

9

123 So great was the fascination of the Granman and of all his people with the phonograph that many times we had occasion to feel if it were not for Apanto's curse, and the habit of elastic to stretch, and of glue to be affected by tropical heat, the machine would have overcome for us what distrust there was of our interest in their beliefs—that it might even have changed the decision of the ancestors when they were consulted by priests in Dahomey—a decision which ruled that the white man and his woman were not to be given the secrets of their worship.

180 Whatever the ancestors had told the men who carried on their heads the sacred plank which was used for consulting the ancestral will, the attitude of the people showed that the white man could not be received in the bush without distrust. The intentions of a white man might be friendly,

yet his findings might in time serve the enemy. We were 123
soldiers bringing toys, as the image of the krutu had suggested.

Since life in the bush, for strangers like ourselves, was lived in terms of days, and each day was taken for what it might bring, we were grateful to those gods who had spoken for us, and watched the effect of the ancestral edict.

Before dawn of the day which followed the ceremony of asking the will of the ancestors, men came to counsel with the Granman, and from then onward many men were about the village. The young boys found their toy guns again, and the little girls played on the river bank. The widow who was so susceptible to evil influences no longer appeared in the central clearing with her child on her back, stamping her rice, or drying her peanuts. Her door was shut. Fenekonde was no longer about, for she had gone to the menstrual house, and Tenemi who came to sweep the council house each morning now wore a new obia on a long, twisted, white cord, hung from shoulder to side. She was polite, formal, and she worked fast.

Late that afternoon the obia man who had appeared at 123
the first council meeting with wide stripes of clay came 791
again, and his wife accompanied him. They were the best 787
diviners on the river. From the corner of the council house
the large mat which had been standing rolled up was carried [285]
into a closed hut, so that he might sit on it, and perform his magic to see what the future held for the destiny of the Saramacca people, and what immediate threat the white man's coming boded. Before leaving for the hut where the mat was prepared the man and woman sat with us in the council house in the company of the Granman. They apparently needed to know our individual names for their task. While we sat there, the white woman absently began to play with the obia about her neck, and this seemed a signal for the other woman to take hers into her hands and begin to mutter an invocation, for the stranger's careless playing appeared to her as the white man's way of casting a spell.

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So it went. The Granman was still a considerate host, but he no longer came to regale us with stories. He was disturbed. Again and again we were assured by indirection that our own motives were not doubted. But in what seemed to them our very foolhardiness in coming that distance, and because we had showed no fear, we had proved that we were being made use of by those who would later show enmity toward them.

When men came whose allegiance would go to any man in power, himself or the next man, the Granman would exclaim with all his splendid oratory that the black man's cause never could be that of the white man. To men of his own village, like the captain who took us down the river, he gave instructions that our every wish was to be met.

It was the way of the politician—and it was more than that. He showed in his manner when he was alone with us that he was deeply puzzled. As a man who had learned to trust his judgments of people, his pride would not permit him to grant that his wits had failed him. Then, too, what he had heard from us had fired his imagination. That he was skeptical of the ancestral revelation, we do not believe, but it was possible that, with the Bush Negro concept of the world of the dead, he might have felt that the great ancestors who were consulted remembered their days of slavery, and would, therefore, never consent to the revealing of secrets to the white man.

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It was our last night in the village of the Granman. In the council house more than thirty people were crowded, standing about the table on which we had placed the phonograph. The Granman sat in his folding chair and looked on without addressing himself to any one.

He had asked us to let all his people hear the machine. When we were gone, many people on the river would talk of it. He wanted all of his village to see how it worked.

GRANMAN MOANA YANKUSO

"You will play everything, white man," he had told us 123
earlier. He had been especially anxious that we play the 177
songs we had recorded in Haiti on our way to Suriname.
Often he had spoken of these songs to the chiefs at council
meetings.

"White man, tell these friends the words of those songs in that foreign tongue."

He had wanted us to speak before these men the words Legba, a deity to them in the bush as he is in Haiti and in West Africa today, and Loko, and Aida Wedo, and to translate the words of the Haitian twin song we had recorded, and the one to the water god Simbi.

Now he sat in his folding chair and looked on in silence, his face thoughtful. The songs he heard moved him deeply, and his expressive face showed it.

When, in the Haitian songs, the women heard the word "Ago-e" which they recognized, they uttered a shriek. It was one of their many words for ancestors. They cried out again when they heard "Aida Wedo" pronounced, and "Loko." They, too, sang of Aida Wedo, and of Alado, and of Loko. Dan was one of their words for snake.

The white man asked permission of the Granman later to 533
record some songs of the people of the village, and promptly 186
Moana Yankuso addressed a man who stood by. The man 177
was a good singer, and his seketi improvisations had made
him a figure on the river.

"Sing for the whites, mati. Let them hear in their far country how our people sing. Let them know that we can sing, that we sing much."

The singer Mapasi sat down and began to sing. His voice was of fine quality, and he was as modest in the midst of all these women with this gift which the gods had given him, as had been the young dancer whom the Granman had summoned to dance for us. He sang in a low voice, and directly into the horn. Accompanying his singing was the hand clapping of the women, which in the small council house was deafening. His recitatives were the longest we had heard on the river, longer by far than those which had

533 surprised us that night at S'ei, and when he paused for a
186 moment the women took up the chorus. From one song to
179 another he went, and the hand clapping grew louder, and the chorus joined in more frequently, often breaking into his recitative, so that there was harmonizing of theme and chorus.

Once or twice the Granman called for a song we had already recorded, in order to give Mapasi a rest.

"Play us something from the lower river, white man. Let them hear their own songs, too, sung by others."

When the excitement of hearing the machine reproduce the song they had just sung had grown less intense, the singers repeated the song the phonograph was reproducing for them, for to listen to music without singing was difficult for them, just as when they sang, they could not but move their feet, though there was scarcely more than room for them to stand one close to the other. But a Bush Negro needs little room for his dancing, so that as the phonograph played their songs for them, they clapped their hands and danced in place. For a short interval, at least, the existence of the whites was forgotten in their pleasure of singing with the machine.

Until late into the night we played our records for them, and they sang for us. Whatever the consequences to the frail records of soft wax, we decided to play as long as they would listen, because of something in the manner of the Granman, something of wistfulness, let us say, and something, perhaps, which went deeper yet, as he sat there—a black Hamlet following a mute soliloquy while he looked on with his clever, perplexed eyes.

"Ai, so it is," he said at last, "and now let us go and get sleep." He rose and the others followed him out of the council house.

II

783 Early the next morning, while the tent on our boat was
782 being finished, the Granman came into the council house
789 with a calabash and a buzzard's feather in his hand. He
574 came up to each of us in turn, and struck with the medicine-
669 dipped feather the tops of our heads, brushed the eyes,

touched the palms of our hands, and struck against the 123
calves three times. 782

"This is obia," he said simply, and when he was finished, 789
he went out. 787

Our cook knew this obia. It was Opete obia, medicine 594
bearing the name of the sacred buzzard. It was given us that 609
we might have a good journey down the river.

"Did you see how he was careful to touch the eyes?" our cook pointed out to us. "The Opete gets the eyes when [776]
it comes to a person, just like Kromanti goes into the head, and Vodu into the belly."

When we went out for a moment, and walked toward our storeroom, we saw the Granman splash water out of a calabash onto the floor and front wall of the house which held our supplies. Was it that our belongings might be safe on our journey down? It was no time for questions, and we asked none.

Women and children again came crowding about the white woman. Though they had been warned not to talk, there was still something of the warm feeling of earlier
times which a command did not entirely destroy. Then, 123
too, the order was that the sendoff was to lack no formality. 931
As we stood there, a dog came running down the path. He 782
was on his way to the river. In his mouth was a large ball of something which had been thoroughly charred. It was an offering to the river spirits, perhaps. It might have been less pleasant magic. He had been sent by men who were busy in the ancestral shrine.

When the white woman called attention to the dog, and asked what he held, the women recoiled with amazement that she should have seen the dog at all. Part of the magic might have been, as it was in some formulas we recorded, that he was to pass by invisible to the strangers. But this is conjecture. . . .

The moment before we went down the path to the river, 123
Amasina came up alone, and gave us her hand. She was 609
gracious, and completely at her ease. Whatever was said, she had faith in her god Towenu, who had vouched for our friendship.

Chapter XV

THE ARTIST OF MA'LOBBI

I

123 WE WERE recalled to the council house for a final
623 informal krutu with Granman Yankuso and some of
his elders before the more formal leave-taking on
579 the river bank. Our boats were being loaded and soon
609 we should be on our way down river. With the elders were
the diviners, and our friend, the bassia.

The Granman opened the krutu, greeting and addressing the men who were present, until he turned to us.

"White man, you and your woman came to my village. I held you both well. Now when you are ready to go I give you my grandson for paddler, and the chief of my village for captain of your boat. That is how we do with those who come in friendship."

Through our town man, as was the way of the krutu, we spoke our acknowledgments to him, and our regrets that our visit was ending. Through our man, the last gifts to the tribal head were tendered, and through one of the elders, the ritual expression of thanks was returned us for what we had put before the Granman.

We had two favors to ask of him. For many days we had lived in this house, and had admired the fine carvings which the council house held. In our own country, when we thought of the days on the upper Saramacca River, a piece of carving from this house would give us much pleasure. But of the elaborate carvings we did not wish to

deprive him. Might we buy, however, one of the simple 123
benches from the shelf above the door, which the chiefs 683
and we ourselves had used many times? 574

The one we took down had interested us for its possible 609
ritual significance. On its top a single design was repeated four times. It was a representation of an axe-head, and the clan of Yankuso was the Matchau, the Axe Clan.

The Granman looked at the diviner. "*Fa fo do?*—What to do?" was his query.

The man he addressed murmured, "*T'obi*—Trouble."

But it was, after all, only a small and slightly ornamented bench.

"Take it!" the Granman said. "What else is it you ask?"

There was the apinti drum. In the house where objects of all peoples of the earth were brought for men and women to look at, there were none of the fine carvings the Bush Negroes make. When we returned, we would place beside the African and Indian objects which were there those of the Saramacca people. As yet, we had not been able to buy an apinti drum. This one was more beautiful than any we had seen. Could he not sell it to us, so that everyone might know that the finest of drums had come from the council house of Moana Yankuso, Granman of the Saramacca people?

This time he did not hesitate. He smiled, and shook his head.

"No, no, white man," he said, "this drum is not for me to sell. This one I cannot part with, not for all your goods. Down river, when you visit my villages, you can get an apinti which will be beautiful. When you come to the village of Akunkun, and you see Kasanya, ask him to find you an apinti. I will tell Captain Mataibo to leave a message at other villages that you want an apinti. This one no gold can buy."

This was not our first attempt to buy an apinti drum. Nor was it to be the last refusal.

Waiting, we sat in the council house while our supplies were being carried to the canoes and placed in them, until

1:Herskovits & Herskovits E-5 (1928-1929) 1934
SR8 Bush Negroes SR8
Saramacca

123 Mataibo, the head of Yankuso's village, who was entrusted
623 with the safe passage of our boats, came to announce that
574 the men had done loading. Before the morning was yet
609 well advanced we left the house, and with the Granman
[554] under his umbrella, which was the highest of insignia,
passed to the river bank.

Our friends were there—the bassia, and Dida, and Amasina, and the Granman's wives and his little grandson, who shouted to us, "*Waka bon, ye'e!*—Travel well, you hear!" in the best manner of his elders. Again three guns sounded, and once more we were on the river, looking up at the people of these villages of the Pikien Rio who were waving to us from the shore.

502 Going down the river was restful. The enjoyment of the easy motion of the boats was felt in the manner of the paddlers themselves. Now there was no hard poling against the heavy current. As canoes were urged on the two paddlers wielded their long blades in unison, and the dugouts swung downstream in the center of the river, where the current was heaviest. When the murmurs of the rapids ahead were heard, it was but a moment until they grew into a roar, and then, in another, we were through, the man at the front standing up for an instant so that, with a twist of his paddle, he might turn the head of the boat from any threatening rock, while the stern man did not stroke at all, but merely held the craft on the course which was marked where the water tossed itself into foam-capped waves. Sometimes, as we came to rapids where the force of the water was especially strong, or there was a sharp double curve to be negotiated, the two boats would pause for a moment while Mataibo called out to the younger men the course to follow. Then into the falls, and through them, and our bow paddler would carefully rearrange his loin cloth and sit down once more to take up his steady stroking.

123 Opposite one village Sungi came in his boat to meet us,
609 to give and receive a final gift, and say his goodbye. But
[831] it was not to the landing place of Dahomey that he took us
for this interchange, but to the village of his wife, he told

us when we asked him. At one landing place where we 123
stopped for a moment, we could hear the drums sounding 609
the rhythm to the river gods, but the drumming stopped abruptly as word went back along the path that white people had come. Men streaked with pemba came down to the river to look at the Bakra who had visited the village of their Granman.

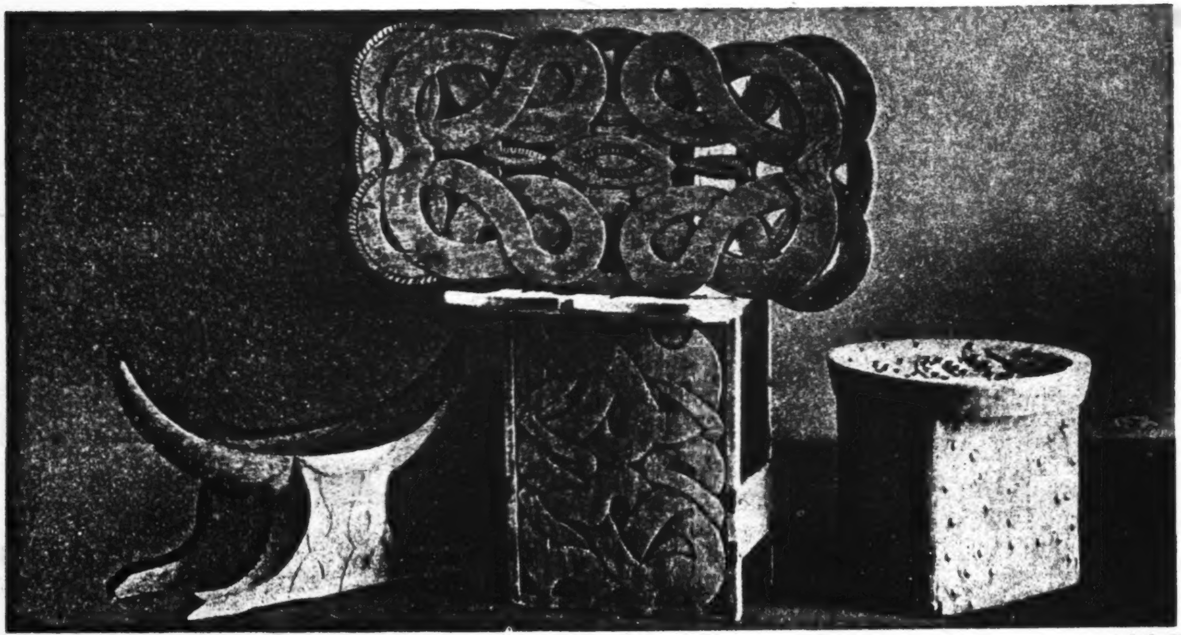
In the boat, we missed Bayo. The grandson of the Gran- 644
man, who was our bow paddler, we had met but casually 123
before we had started. There had been none of the chances 609
for conversation that had made of Bayo a friend before he and his great-grandfather came to take us to the country of the Granman. Later we would come to know this youth for a pleasant young man, capable and quiet, who was proud to show his ability, and quick to resent the suggestions of our town man in such matters as making a shelter for the night.

"We are children of the bush!" the young man exclaimed sharply. "We know how to make this." And such a good shelter did the paddlers build that men of a near-by village,
who passed, stopped and asked that it not be torn down the [485]
next morning, as had to be done with shelters erected for the night on the land of a strange clan, but that we should let it stand so that others might use it.

When we asked him questions, however, or made observa- [157]
tions on people who passed by in their canoes, he gave us noncommittal replies. Mataibo, the captain of our boat, was even more reserved, though he liked to twit our town man, and in an unofficial capacity would have been amusing. Conversation between the two paddlers, or between them and the two young men who were entrusted with our
other boat, was in the clipped, rapid "deep-Saramacca" [197]
speech which, in spite of our use of it in conversation at the Granman's village, we still found it difficult to follow when Bush Negroes spoke informally to one another.

As the day wore on, we began to get used to the rapidity 484
with which village after village was passed. Here was the landing place of the one where we had stopped so that

1: Herskovits & Herskovits E-5 (1928-1929) 1934
SR8 Bush Negroes SR8
Saramacca



Ceremonial benches incised with symbols of fertility and magic.

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[Facing p. 272]

(Facing page 272)

484 Sedefo might greet his sister. It was almost a half-day's travel, going up river, from Asindopo Lantiwe, yet it was not quite noon, and we were passing it. Here was Hei Kununu, its steep slopes already swinging into sight as we rounded a bend of the river and came through the small rapids above the settlement, and still it seemed as though we had but begun our course down toward our base camp and the railhead. And it was still early in the afternoon when we came to Ma'lobbi.

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462 At the landing place, women were about. Much of the
work of the Bush Negro woman is at the river's edge, and
for strangers like ourselves, passing in a dugout, the
presence of women working on the bank was the only sign
[361] that here was a landing place, and that farther inland lay a
[412] village. To the river they came with their carved clothes
[296] beaters, like the one we could see in the hand of the woman
who greeted us here at Ma'lobbi, fashioned, as we later
learned when she sold it to us, in the shape of a male vodu
head on one end, and a female snake on the other. It was
at the edge of the water that a woman scraped cooking pots
[264] and calabash dishes with sand, and it was here, if it
seemed a good day for fishing, that a woman would go
wading in the water to rest a cooking pot on the river
[226] bottom, and stand silently until an inquisitive school of
small fish swam into it when, with a quick jerk, she would
bring it up to take out what fish there were. This, aside
from the use of small hooks, was the only kind of fishing a
woman could do, for the fishing traps were for the use of
men. But the cooking pot brought in many small fish to add
flavor to a dish of rice.

123 As we walked into the village, accompanied by one of our
609 younger paddlers, the bassia greeted us. The head of the
village was waiting for us, he told us. Paddlers of small boats
on their way downstream had spread the word that our
visit with the Granman was drawing to an end.

THE ARTIST OF MA'LOBBI

As we walked toward the chief's house we looked about 322
us, seeing again the evidence that here at Ma'lobbi there 531
were men who knew how to carve wood, seeing why it was that our paddlers had spoken of it as a place for fine work.

"Ai, at Ma'lobbi they are good carvers."

Here was a house with its doorposts elaborately carved; [342]
there a beautifully worked rice tray, lying where it had been left by the woman who owned it, until she should need it later in the day for winnowing her rice; farther along a great bench stood, with the designs cut through in a fluid progression over top and sides.

The captain was in the lower portion of his two-story 123
house when we entered. Several of the older men, who had 609
been present at our earlier visit and who remembered our gifts of tobacco, came to join us, as the news of our arrival spread through the village. Soon the women were standing about, motioning to the white woman to come with them.

The house in which the captain received us was larger and 342
more imposing than the others in the village. It was his 556
gudu-wosu—his treasure house. Its lower portion, where we sat in conversation with him, was where he worked. Above, where none of his wives might enter, his wealth was stored. Here he kept the pieces he had carved, and from here drew from time to time the presents he gave his wives. Here
lay the wealth which his nephews would inherit when he [408]
died. But below, in the partially open shelter, was his [322]
workshop where he fashioned rough logs into stools and paddles, combs and food stirrers, trays and canoe seats, and all manner of objects which he and his women used in their daily routine.

All about the walls hung tools. There were machetes, 342
whose sharp blades showed a reflection of fire from the sun 353
which slanted on the wall. We had never seen so many of 412
these bush knives on display, nor, for that matter, such an array of tools anywhere on this river. From projecting boards or nails driven into posts hung several compasses,
their hinged arms sharp-pointed, so that the craftsman [413]
might describe the perfect circles on the wood he carved.

353 This they had learned from the whites long ago, and
177 now everywhere on the river compasses were seen, or
[413] carvings which showed their use. The machete, the small
412 sharp knives which lay about here on the work-table, the
compass, and sand made up any Bush Negro carver's tools. But here at Ma'lobbi in this workshop of the captain were tools from the white man's city, collected by himself on his journeys down to the government office to receive his yearly allowance, or by his men who had been to the French shore and learned of the ways of the outside world. There was a plane to make the blade of a paddle smooth as the skin of a child, and there were two others in addition to this one, we were assured, in the treasure house of the upper story. Hammers, too, were useful for making boats, and even for smaller carvings like benches. There was also a bit and auger, though we were never convinced that the captain himself had ever put it to its more prosaic uses.

"I have many more up there," said the captain, pointing to the upper story. "I like them. If a man likes his tools, then they help him in his carvings. As he sees with his eyes, so they cut. I have always liked my tools, white man. I have spent much time with them."

221 A young man sat to one side shaving down a block of
322 wood with a knife which he held.

"He is not carving," the captain said, following our eyes. "He is making a piece for this," he explained, indicating a plane. "Now is not the time for carving. There is too much to be done. This is the time for cutting wood, for taking the rafts down the river, for making boats, for bleeding rubber trees for the white man, and for hunting game. When the great rains come, then men sit about and carve."

322 As he spoke our eyes traveled to the various carvings
531 which stood about the workshop. In one corner leaned a
paddle which caught our attention because of its darkened
color, and the patina which long use had given it, so that it
seemed made of ebony. Against another wall were several
[352] stools, all richly ornamented with carvings, while beside us,

and so close that our hands, moving about to find a rest, 322
touched its top, and sounded an involuntary rhythm, was 531
an apinti drum. We exclaimed at its beauty, for in form and [534]
carving it rivaled the one we had admired in the council house of Granman Yankuso, and we were determined to try to buy it. But we turned our conversation to other things. A stranger in this bush soon learns from the Bush Negroes to broach an important request gently, remembering the cautioning proverb spoken by the chameleon.

We talked of carving, of the white man's coming back 322
some year when the rains were heavy to sit by and watch 124
the men make paddles and benches, so that he might learn, 439
as children learn.

The captain was politely skeptical. It took a Saramacca hand to do this work. But he smiled, "Ma kye, if you have the gods anything is possible."

"That's a fine paddle in the corner."

He brought it out, and we admired it. Would he sell it to us?

"You must ask its owner."

"Didn't you make it, captain?"

"Yes, but it is not mine to sell. I gave it to my wife." He would see, however, if she wanted to sell it. He would himself go and call her.

As he went, he gave us the paddle that we might examine 532
it. We ran our hands over the smooth top, the design, the 501
beveled blade. It was not so tall as the paddles used by the 322
men, nor was its blade so broad as those used in steering the great boats through the rapids. In form, it was quite different from the round-bladed type used by the Indians of the region, for it was slender and came to a sharp point, and at the other end the carving formed a crutch-shaped hold into which the hand fitted.

We studied this carving. Parts of the design had meaning for us because of their realistic treatment. The motifs of others were recognizable to us from explanations we had been given of other carvings. But there were still details

532 of design which only the carver himself could name, or
501 someone who knew the symbolism of the art tradition in
302 which this paddle was carved.

During our first visit to these people we had been com-
532 pletely balked by the unwillingness of the Bush Negroes to
123 discuss their carvings. In answer to our questions we got
delightful evasions, but with the coming of Bayo to our base camp, carrying his crudely carved stool, we learned enough to make it clear that there was a great deal of symbolism in the carving of the Bush Negroes and, as our knowledge of these symbols increased, it became increasingly easier to get descriptions of carvings in terms of the meanings and values these held for the Bush Negroes themselves.

532 Now, sitting in the workshop of one of the finest of Saramacca carvers, the captain of Ma'lobbi, we traced those parts of the design which we knew, mentioning their significance to the men who were about.

"There are two snakes," we said, pointing to the realistically entwined bodies which formed the upper portion of the hand grip, ending at the top with recognizable heads, and with mouths held open, which supported symmetrical figures of the top of the paddle.

"Aboma snakes," one man said, verifying to himself our statement.

"These," we continued, "are the teeth of the great lizard—*bamba tande*—and this part below the hand-grip reaching part way toward the blade is a carved chain, and you call it *moni mo' muye*—money is more than woman."

The men laughed. "Awa, so it is. The man knows about Saramacca carving."

And one of them took up the explanation, pointing out the two symmetrical figures which were posed opposite each other above the mouths of the snakes. "These are monkeys. They are women monkeys. No, don't call them just keskesi, their name is makaka," he went on, giving us the name of the species, when we spoke the word for monkey. "See the ears, the heads, the breasts. Ai, I

know you see them. They told you much on the upper 532
river."

As he finished speaking, the captain returned with his 532
wife. Excited comments greeted him. 123

"The white man here knows *tembe*—carving."

"He knows lizard's teeth design."

"He knew that this was the aboma snake, and the makaka."

The old man was skeptical. "*A so?* Was it true?" Let the Bakra show him.

We repeated the lesson we had just learned to the captain and his wife who owned the paddle. They listened thoughtfully. Then the woman spoke.

"White man, I have used this paddle for many years. [439]
I do not like to sell it. But you care for it. You are a man who knows carving. In your country you tell me other men know carving. They will look at it, and see it is beautiful, and they will know it is from the Saramacca. Take it, and pay me what you like."

There were other carvings which we bought—a large rice- 532
carrying tray, and some food stirrers, one of which was 439
especially fine, made as it was of two small paddles with miniature blades, the handles joined by a wooden ring-chain, and all of this carved out of one piece of wood.

3

Few things on the river seemed to the outsiders more 532
characteristic of the life of the Saramacca people than these carvings which were met with everywhere, however small the village, however poor the home. When the seasonal rains came, men incised their desires on wood, which later told the legend of procreation, or safety on the river, or a curse invoked against a woman if she proved unfaithful; or something of humor, such as a man bidding for a girl's favor, and she refusing him, while up above intertwined were a man and woman, symbolizing the ultimate consummation with the proper suitor.

531 431 The greater part of these carvings men made for women, and it was a rare woman who did not take pride in the excellence of the carvings given her, though often it must have been the pride in something which had traditional value, for it would be false to assume that among any people are all men equally endowed with creativeness and all women with sensitive appreciation of what is created.

462 532 322 As among so many peoples, two or three types of art were to be found. There was the same sex division in the art of these people as existed in all other aspects of life, and the men were the wood carvers. The sharpest division in the art of the men was that between the secular and the religious. The religious art was crude. A block of wood, roughly shaped, with several cuts to indicate a face, perhaps a break in the line to represent the neck, and a few more strokes in the wood to differentiate the upper part of the woman's body, and there stood an ancestral image, or a village god. Often white clay was added to this, and sometimes alternate stripes of white and red, or white, red, and black, but when seen on a village path underneath a low open shelter, what color there once was had become
[778] weathered to a dull gray. The sacred art also included the
[789] charms called obias, worn on the neck, and about the upper
arm, or wrist, or below the knee, or at the ankle. Many
[301] of these made pleasing ornaments. The white fiber dipped in red clay became a deep golden brown as the sun paled the crimson, and there would be the added color of a finger's length of blue and orange parrot feather, fastened inside the woven fiber square, and extending below the fringe of the weave. Into this woven square cowries might be sewn, two facing each other, or three, or four.

532 There was also the art of modeling, but this was so secret and so specialized that we were assured that not even all Bush Negroes knew of its existence, and modeled objects appeared only in the most important of the shrines.

With the religious art might also perhaps be grouped the red and white striped crooked sticks of the Kromanti society, the "Congo" sticks, as they were called here, or the "fighting" sticks. 532

The carvings, however, which we were admiring in the house of the captain of Ma'lobbi were for secular use. The Bush Negro craftsman brought to the ornamenting [501] of his paddles and his canoe seats, to his house posts, and particularly to the door of his treasure house, to his women's combs, and trays, and food stirrers, and clothes beaters all the traditional skill and patience. But the exceptional carver brought also the cunning in his fingers which his gods had given to him and only to few others on the river. Such a man was the captain of Ma'lobbi. Into the traditional designs such a man wove lines for the love of seeing them grow under his hand, for there were always single motifs which the people versed in the symbolism of the art would describe as "beautiful," as having no meaning. Yet with few exceptions the massing of outlines in a unified design bore on fertility. Men and women alone or together, and male and female animals were represented in all but occasional pieces.

The Bush Negro artist was a man of consequence on the 532
river. His companions admired his skill, and the young 554
women were proud to have his handiwork. If he showed 584
his gifts early, he was at an advantage in courting a girl of an influential family. The girl's mother, who shared in the gifts of her daughter's suitor, might be willing to overlook other less advantageous traits in the man or in his family, while the girl's uncles would not be loath to have such a man in their family to teach his art to his sons, who would be their successors.

On several occasions we were permitted to see how very 432
deeply this appreciation of fine carving went. As in the 562
instance of the paddle we had acquired from the wife of 439
the captain of Ma'lobbi, it had happened often that the consent of the woman to sell a given piece was necessary before any trading could take place. Sometimes we traded directly with the woman, sometimes she asked her husband, or her brother, or her son, as the more worldly

432 person, to act for her. But always hers was the final word,
562 and often that word when the time came for us to carry
439 away the piece was "No."

"It was made for me by my husband when I was a young girl. Now he sleeps, he is no more. I want to have it," was a statement which ended all bargaining.

Sometimes even after we had paid the woman, and stored the piece away, she returned with the moist coins in her hand, asking for the carved implement.

"Before some man from here will go to the city to buy me a pangi, I may lose the money, or he may lose it on the way. But if the clothes beater is here, I can use it and look at it. I want to keep it."

413 One vivid incident of bargaining concerned a peanut
532 pounding board which had belonged to the sister of Bassia
439 Anaisi. We were sitting and talking with him and his grandmother, when our eyes rested on his sister's house. From a projection hung a strikingly beautiful piece of carving. The rectangular portion of the board on which the peanuts were crushed was bordered on top and bottom with filigreed carving. It was made of brown-heart wood with inlays of purple-heart. Bassia Anaisi's sister supplemented our guesses of what the designs meant. The top represented a woman's head and headdress. The small brass nails, which made a glistening line in the center of the upper curve, were the cicatrizations on the woman's face.

"Look," said the woman, "she is a woman, but a woman hawk. Here is her neck, and the small cut-out circles here are her breasts, those curves at both ends are the wings. The very small nails are the cicatrizations on the thighs. She is a woman, and she has made herself beautiful. This large rounded portion is her belly, and the smaller one underneath is the *gonu mofo*—the gun's mouth," the last being their image for the vagina. Meeting this from the bottom curving upwards was a half-circle, which represented the male member. At the other end was more embellishment. In the center was a double curve to symbolize the first phase of the moon. Below were two "*Ingi Kodyo,*"

Indian cudgels, a figure of speech for the buttocks, in this 413
instance those of the woman, and again the male representa- 532
tion. This was edged with a border of deep curves which 439
the woman said was mere ornamentation—scrolls. On another pounding board, however, of this village, a similar border was said to represent the boa constrictor. This board stood on two legs, each the width of the board and about two inches high, and worked in the same cut-through scroll design.

When we suggested that we might care to acquire the 532
board, the woman became apprehensive. She took up the 439
board, and excusing herself, disappeared with it inside her 439
hut.

"No, no," she called from the house, when her brother went to tell her of the offer we had made for it. "I don't want money for it. I like it. I will not sell it."

The sum we offered was modest enough, but not inconsiderable for this deep interior. We increased it, then doubled our original offer. There was still no wavering on the woman's part, but the offer began to interest her family. Such wealth should not be refused. Bassia Anaisi began to urge her in our behalf.

"With this money you can buy from the white man's city a hammock, and several fine cloths. You should not refuse this."

The old woman took up the discussion, then another sister, and a brother. At last the bassia took us aside, and asked us to leave his sister alone with them.

"We will have a krutu, and tomorrow you will hear. She is foolish not to sell. But she cares for the board. It is good, too, when a woman loves what her man has carved for her. We will krutu about it, and you shall hear."

Three days passed before the woman's permission was given to dispose of the piece.

"When they see this, your people will know our men can carve!" she exclaimed in a voice which held as much regret as pride.

4

532 The cult of fertility came to the Suriname bush from
831 Africa. Deepseated today in this civilization, it is not
strange that it should be invoked again and again in the
carvings, that men and women in sexual congress, and
animals in the act of reproduction should dominate the
art motifs, and in particular those carvings which men
make for their women.

532 The symbolism is known to all on the river though, as
we have indicated, a gifted artist might play with his
medium, and even give his own name to what he had
designed. Evidences of nontraditional playing with technique
were, to be sure, not met with often, but one or two
instances stand out. One that was especially striking was a
hinged folding stool, fashioned after a bench seen in the
[352] city, and decorated in traditional fashion, where the prob-
[197] lem of decorating unfamiliar surfaces was met.

Bayo could take up many of our photographs of pieces,
532 acquired during our first visit and brought here into the
193 bush to show the natives how their pieces were exhibited,
177 and describe the symbols to us which made up the carvings.
There was one which interested him especially. He used
to sit with the photograph in his hand, running his fingers
over the glossy surface, as though he felt if he continued
doing it long he would actually feel the texture of the wood
which was so clearly imaged.

532 "Everything shows. Here's a crack, see?" Then his
hands touched one motif after another. "This and this are
women, and these are men. A man and woman to one
side, and a man and woman facing them. It's like having
the tray here, white man." The small designs close to the
rim of the tray, facing each other, were the children to be
[845] born of these unions. "This is a boy, and this a girl. That
is for both women to make twins."

We were looking over his shoulder as he explained the symbols, but still could not distinguish in the symbols to the side which represented the male child and which the female.

THE ARTIST OF MA'LOBBI

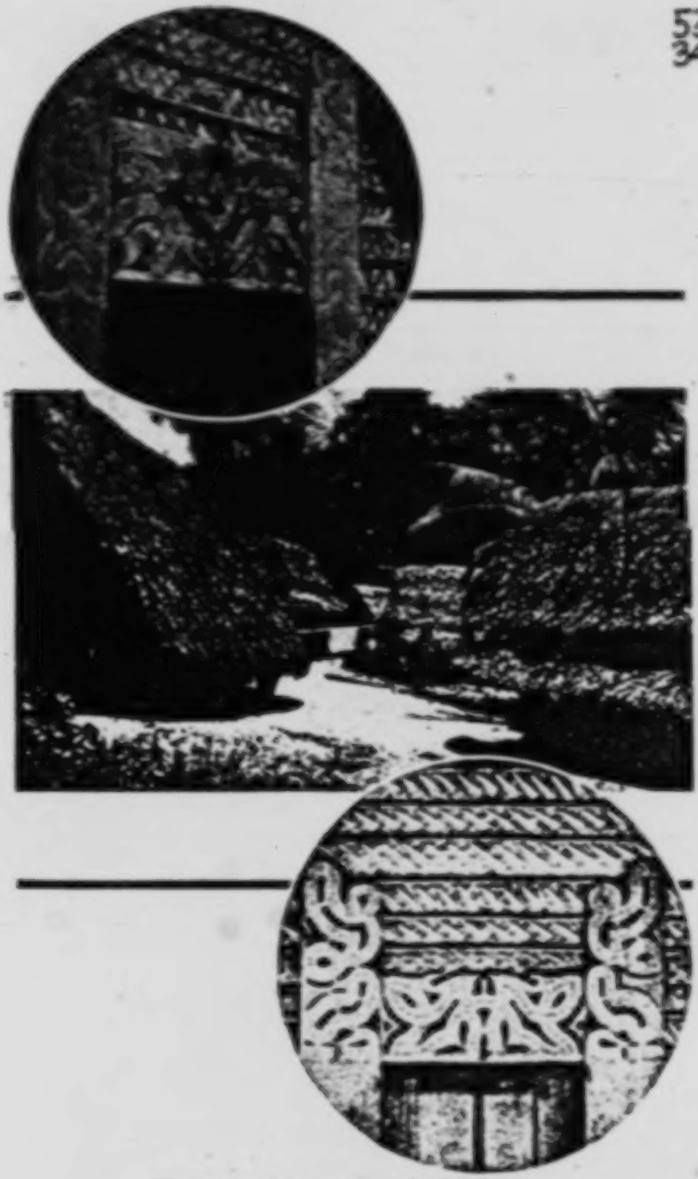
Bayo laughed. "All this isn't easy, white man. A line about this curve shows this to be a man-child. These are things bush people alone know." 532

The decorated rim of this tray had interested many who had seen the piece the winter before, and we had had pointed out to us what we ourselves had remarked, that the design was not continuous all around, but that it was divided into four parts, the crosshatched portion alternating with that of checkered squares. Did those have meaning? we asked Bayo.

"Ai, these belong to the women and the children. The small lines are the hair of the children, and the squares here that of the women." The brass-headed nails he touched one by one on the photograph. "The women have nice kamemba," he said, at last.

On the upper river we had acquired another tray with similar motifs, but more elaborately decorated, with carvings on the outer surface as well as the inner, and also with many more brass-headed nails. This use of nails, which was more general in the deep interior, had at first seemed an anomaly, for they must come from the white man's city, [184] since the Bush Negro, we knew, had lost the African [77] technique of iron working. But as we saw more deeply into their customs, we recognized that these nails studding the carvings represented a survival of the African art tradition, and it was, therefore, reasonable that in the deep interior they should be found more profusely on the carvings.

Human representations outlined with the realism of 532 African masks we almost never met, and the exceptional 171 instances suggested only resemblances. The mask itself, [535] as far as we could learn, was not used in their dances. The men knew what masks were, but whether this knowledge came as part of their African tradition, or whether it was brought from the city and the French shore, we could not determine. The African style of depicting the human form had, however, not been entirely lost by their slave ancestors. In this village of Ma'lobbi, where lived one of the finest 532 carvers on the river, the carving over a doorway held us



Houses and house posts in Ma'lobbi.

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(Facing page 384)

532 fascinated. It showed, in its purest form, the retention of the African mask-like head. Sometimes on the prow of a boat we would see in cruder form the outlines of a mask, and once an old woman came with a food stirrer to us. Its handle ended in a knob which with a few strokes of the knife had been formed into a double representation of the human [191] head, a perfect parallel to the type of mask that is associated with the people of the Ivory Coast.

532 191 Aside from the decorated apinti drum, only some of the workaday art forms of Africa—combs, paddles, mortars, among other such objects—were retained. For their decoration the designs that in Africa had been cut into the base of figures or about the borders of masks had been remembered and reinterpreted in terms of the ancestral cults. And from those memories the Bush Negroes had developed the unique art which is theirs.

532 181 84 Thus, in the main, the art was symbolic, and many of the designs represented the urge for reproduction. Some stemmed from the fertility cult, though not entirely of it. There was, for example, the double-bladed food stirrer, [626] which was given by a man to his wife with a curse woven into its curves for the woman if she committed adultery.

532 There were carvings that did not deal with sex at all. On the lower river we sat on the shore as a canoe came up. Prow and stern were carved. On one of the seats was a representation of the head of a feline, done with the utmost realism.

"You have *tigri?*" we asked the man, as we bargained for the seats.

"I will sell you this, but do not ask me what it means."

The bird-headed paddles were also examples of this kind. [501] When laid on their sides, they showed the form of the parrot, or whatever bird they represented—the exaggerated beak, the head, the neck, the wings, and the feet. The [791] design called *Alukutu folo*, an emblem of those who could see into the future, was engraved on many benches on the upper river in particular, and these carvings were parted with only with the greatest reluctance, lest we try

magic on their owners. And there was the Gankwe woman 532
who brought us a paddle representing the bird she called
the *apassa.*

"We Gankwe people do not eat the apassa," she had [262]
whispered to us when we bought the paddle.

5

In the house of the captain of Ma'lobbi we sat and talked of the carvings of the Saramacca people, and as we talked, they brought us some of the things the men of the village had carved.

"Do all men carve?" we asked the chief.

"Not everyone has the spirit. But every young man 463
tries. If a man is good at hunting, or on the river, then perhaps he can get the things he needs to give his wife from others for what he can give the carver. But it is better that he do these things for his wife himself. The women like it better."

Not everyone could make a boat, he said, nor was every- 463
one able to carve the *pau pau dindu,* the intricate 532
"wood within wood" motifs that made a strip go like a twisted snake in and out, in and out, through a design. And not everyone could make a drum. Like that apinti he had there.

It was the opening for which we had been waiting. 532

We had been admiring this drum since we had come into 584
his house, we said. We remembered it from the first time 432
on our way up river. It was as fine as any we had seen. 439
Had he made it himself?

He smiled his appreciation.

"It is a fine apinti, ai," agreed several of the men sitting about.

An apinti was one of the things we wanted to take to show the white man. This one, especially, we would like to buy. Would he sell it?

He looked at us for a moment, and then gently shook his head. "To make an apinti is not a small thing. Not everyone can make an apinti. I have worked on it for a long time, and it is not yet finished. This drum I will not sell."

532 We redoubled our urging.

534 "White man, do you know what it is to make an apinti—
431 an obia drum?"

439 A man had to have the proper spirit before he might address the god of the tree from which the drum was to
534 be made. When he had felled the tree, he cut off from the
399 trunk the part he wanted to use and took it to his village. Over it he had to pour the blood of a cock which he sacri-
532 ficed that the gods might come when the drum called them.
[180] The maker had also to provide sweet rum and cassava and eggs. The cassava was eaten by the people, but the eggs were for the spirit of the drum, and only half the sweet rum was drunk—the rest was poured over the wood. When the body of the new drum had been fashioned, the people gathered and sang, but they did not dance, for the head yet remained to be made. A pingo, or a deer, might furnish the skin, but these animals were shot where they had been tracked in the bush, and not offered to the drum. Only chickens were given it. And when the drum was complete, then the maker sang his song alone.

"But the drum is not finished yet. It can be played on, for it has a head, and its spirit has been satisfied. But the carving is not yet done. I have worked on it a long time," he repeated. "I want them to play it for my spirit when I am dead."

A silence fell as he finished. There was nothing more to be said.

532 "White man, we have sat together in pleasure. You
435 have come to the true, true Saramacca from far away.
439 You have bought the carvings of my people. The apinti
[431] drum I cannot sell you. But this stool you like I want you to have."

He took up one of the round-topped benches, with carefully worked sides, and four purple-heart inlays on top, each in the shape of a fowl.

"Take it with you to your white man's country. When you show it, write on a paper that the captain of Ma'lobbi made it."

Chapter XVI

BAYO, THE PLAYBOY

I

IT HAD been a day of hard travel, down the Mamadam, 502
through the Musumba Prati, and down the long weary- 484
ing stretch of quiet water until we reached the Tita Buka Falls. The memory of the up-river passage of these troubled stretches had not yet worn down sufficiently to allow of contemplating the downgoing without a measure of strain, but our anxiety turned to astonishment when the paddlers, skirting above the thunder of the water, steered the boats into a barely visible channel down which we floated by easy stages.

"Mati-o," said chief Mataibo to the young men, when we had made the singularly fine passage, "the gods are taking them with pleasure. We must do the same!"

Passing the Gran' Creek he prayed from midstream, 782
calling on the spirit of the creek, whom he addressed as ancestor, to give us long life in our white man's country.

Now we were here at Djamungo, at Bayo's village where, 789
if he were only there, we should be seeing a fine dance, 361
and where, what at the moment was far more important for us, many sacred objects awaited us. Djamungo was a village about whose magic other villages on the river were uneasy.

"Bayo is at Gankwe waiting for you. He is helping the 609
men haul lumber, but when he hears you are back, he will come," said a woman who came up saying she was his

609 mother. The woman who had made Bayo was her sister, she told us.

142 The resemblance between this woman and Bayo was marked. She had the same dark skin, the same stocky, muscular build, the broad nose, the same general cast of features we had known so well in Bayo. Similar, too, were the sharply etched scars on her face, which were so black and so prominent as to bespeak her great vitality and rugged health. There were other likenesses, we learned, and of these the most valued was the strength of their gods.

789 794 562 We had not been long in her hut before we noticed the iron arm-band she wore. It was, we knew, a "*tapu*"—a magical preventive which, in this instance, warned its wearer of danger, and kept her from harm in a combat. Seeing it on the arm of a woman was astonishing for many reasons. Not in all our encounters on the river had we seen a woman wearing an arm obia of iron. Iron was the sign of the Kromanti, a men's group, composed of those men [595] who had the Kromanti spirit. It was in part warriors' secret society, and in part, when it was Obia Kromanti, the men's religious society which controlled the powerful supernatural forces of preventive and healing magic which played so prominent a part in the spiritual life of the Bush Negro. Now there were, we had been told, some women who inherited the Kromanti spirit, but these were few, and not until after their menopause could they enter a Kromanti house, and when this came they were too old to participate in the dance, but they sang the songs when the spirit came to them and did whatever else was known to the initiated of their years.

But this woman who was Bayo's mother's sister was not an old woman. As she talked to us, in fact, her breast was [853] swung over to the side, and against her ribs was the head of the child on her back who was nursing. Yet on her arm was the fighter's "tapu," as the emblem of membership in the Kromanti group.

This was so important an anomaly that, following the etiquette of the bush, we hastened at once to talk about something else.

BAYO, THE PLAYBOY

"Will Bayo be married before we leave the bush?" we 115
asked, telling her that only a short time would see us returning to our own country.

We had often talked of marriage with Bayo on our trip up river and had offered to make up what he lacked in gifts and money that we might witness the festivities of marriage. He had, of course, promised to have matters arranged.

Bayo's aunt laughed, however, when she heard the question, and turned to the other woman who was with us in the dimly lighted hut.

"Did you hear what the white man asks?" she called 584
out to her companion. "White man, let me tell you some- 115
thing. Bayo is a long way from marrying yet. Why, his girl's breasts haven't begun to come yet!"

It seemed that Bayo had also to see to many things before he could marry. He had not yet cut the field for his mother-in-law, nor had he made any of the carvings which he needed to give his betrothed and her mother, for Bayo was a poor carver.

"Bayo has cunning in his eyes, and his head, but his 115
fingers have no cunning, Bak'a. . . . But you know this, Bayo is strong."

Her train of thought turned at the last phrase to our journey up river. Had we traveled well with Bayo? Had he got on with the other men? Awa, she knew that people liked him. It was the obia he had, and his own gods, but his gods were bad, too.

"When he was in his mother's womb, he troubled her [843]
much. He tore at her. Ai, she had no happy time of it with Bayo."

We remembered the incest kunu in Bayo's family, which 684
lay in wait for all its members, killing off one by one until 776
the line was wiped out. We ventured a cautious question.

"You are the sister of Bayo's mother?"

The answer, however, did not take us to kunu, but rather 115
to the iron on her arm. 776

"Ai, and of his father who is now dead. In our family we 789
have strong gods. It is these that have come to Bayo. . . ."

115 “So we see from the Kromanti obia on your arm.” Was
776 she, a woman, possessed of the war-like Kromanti spirit?
789 we asked her.

“It is as you see. I am a woman, and I have Kromanti—and it's strong Kromanti.”

“We had not heard of women your age getting Kromanti.”

“Ai, there are not many, but when my spirit comes, I dance heavy. I dance like the men.”

We must have appeared unconvinced, for she became more emphatic.

“What they do in other villages, white man, I do not know. But I have Kromanti, and when the drums speak here at Djamungo I, too, come.”

She rose and went into the inner chamber of the house, where the hammocks were hung, and brought out several objects wrapped in old cloth.

432 “Bayo said I should have obias for you when you came.
439 He said you would pay well for obias. I have these for
789 you.”

The trading commenced. There were two small images—“*gadus*” they were called, both crudely carved. One was called Winti Nyamusi. It was a spirit which gave children to women.

782 “When I come to ask for children, then I take sweet
842 rum in my mouth, and I spray the gadu, then I say, ‘*Nay-musi, da wa' buno mi'i*—O Spirit Naymusi! Give me a fine child.’ Then the child will come.”

What was the other image, the larger one, with anteater's bristles inserted at sides and top?

“That is a Kromanti obia. It is the Opete spirit, the buz-
789 zard. When you take it with you, you must speak to it so.
782 You must say, ‘Obia-o, I am carrying you away with me. You must look after me, you must see that my life is spared, O great spirit.’ Then you must spray it with rum, but not the sweet rum, not for Kromanti.”

789 There were other obias she had for us, some to be worn about the neck, and others to be worn below the knee.

"Bayo has asked me to find a strong *asumani* for you," 789
she said, naming the obia she held with the word for such magically endowed properties used by the Ashanti today, on the West Coast of Africa. In rapid succession she gave us the African words of the Kromanti designation for the white clay, for the ancestral pot, and for several other ceremonial objects we discussed with her.

"Did you make these for us?" [462]

"Ah, no. Women do not make obias. My brother made [564]
them for you."

The next morning when we were leaving Djamungo she came to the landing place with us. In our hands were the images we had bought. The young paddlers looked on them with fear. On no account would they even come too close to us who carried them. It was not the image, nor the external properties of a sacred object which disclosed its power, but rather the magic that had been called to reside in it, and the strength of the gods of him who had been instrumental in bringing the magic to the figure of wood, the brass bell, the cowrie shells, the ant-eater's bristles, or whatever else was used.

"Tell them in your village," Bayo's mother's sister called after us, "that here at Djamungo the Kromanti spirit does not come to men only. When women get Kromanti, they, too, can fight."

2

We had not been back at our base camp for more than 574
a day when Bayo came up the path calling the greeting 609
of a comrade. Had we fared well with the Granman?

He had, he told with pride, seen all those things a man who went on so long a journey should see, and he had been to Lamé again, where there were strong obias and where the women knew how to love. Now he would remain with 115
us until we left the bush, and he might even decide to go 556
with us to the city, and from there to the French shore, where there was money to be got. What with the money he had earned for timber, and the money we had given

115 [556] [584] him, and what he could get on the Marowyne in a year, it would be possible for him to see to it that his betrothed had all the gifts that a man of position gave to his woman. There were, too, other things to bear in mind. Already he had seen a girl who would make a desirable second wife, but that would require still more money.

115 593 "But, Bayo," we interposed, "we saw your mother at Djamungo. She told us your girl will not be ready for marrying for some time."

"Did she say that? Did she tell you that I am still a child?"

"What's the matter, Bayo? Don't you like her?"

"Awa, I like her. Not too much. She likes to talk."

231 224 We thought it politic to give the subject a new turn. Close beside Bayo lay the dog that had accompanied him the first time he came to us here, before our journey up the river. His was a curious color, a faint pinkish hue which puzzled us.

"What is the color of your dog, Bayo?"

"He is white when he does not have obia on him. He is a hunting dog. Tross is his name. He will stay with me. The obia comes off when he goes into the river."

We laughed. "Does Tross hunt in the river, Bayo?"

"No. In the bush. But if I leave him behind, he swims out to my canoe."

231 789 Tross was to become better known to us as the days went on. He had a great affection for his master, and this feeling extended to all those who appertained to Bayo. After Bayo had attached himself to our camp, we, too, came under the aura of his dog's regard, though this may have been made the more reasonable by the fact that the netting of the mosquito guards of our hammocks appealed to Tross as a comfortable place to spend the night. He was a good watchdog, and sometimes we were awakened by his low growl, and a voice saying "*Cho!*—Be quiet!" Just now we were interested in the cord about his neck, and we asked Bayo about it.

"It is more obia. It is strong, too. Nothing happens to Tross when he goes in the bush. You will see."

BAYO, THE PLAYBOY

The conversation turned to the lumbering Bayo had 313
been doing. He had been helping some of the Gankwe men bring to the river the wood they had felled. To cut down a tree was not hard work, Bayo told us. It was, however, no easy matter to bring the trunks to the water. For in the tropical jungle timber does not grow in the convenient "stands" known to the northern forests. The searcher for rare woods will find a single purple-heart tree here, and there, some distance away, a brown-heart or one of the other trees for which the white man is willing to pay well. With machete or axe the tree is felled and stripped of its bark, and squared into a great long timber. The under part of each end is shaped so that as it goes down the river it will not split against the rocks it strikes.

Going back from the river bank are to be seen openings in the bush and these lead to places where trees have been cut. At short intervals lengths of branches are laid across them. It is over these that the timber is hauled to the river—over these main lumber ways, and over the smaller ones that must be cut deep in the bush from every felled tree to these principal paths.

Bayo had been hauling lumber. Cut and dressed, the 313
paths made ready, the logs had been taken to the river. 476
The Gankwe men had summoned their friends and the men of neighboring villages to help them. The weight of the hard wood is such that it takes great strength to haul the squared logs over the paths. Bayo had gone with the men into the forest, and there they had spent more than a week, eating of the rice and cassava of the men whose lumber they were hauling, and having a pleasant time of it, with joking and horseplay.

"When we haul the wood, we sing *so te* . . . until 313
. . . " he said, prolonging his last syllables in the charac- 476
teristic way. 533

The one whose logs were being brought to the water opened the singing by first speaking his thanks in a formal chant to those who had come to help him.

313
416 *"You have come to go, come to go far, come to go far*
533 *to bring the wood to the water. But it is long, it is far, to*
[539] *the river. Thank you, friends."*

Then the song was taken up by the workers and, with each rhythmic measure, the great piece of lumber went farther through the jungle on its way to the river. When he had chanted for us the greeting to the men, Bayo began to sing a song relating to men's casual exploits with [831] women and, as he finished the song, he laughed. "White man, if you came with us, you would hear what songs the men make up about women!"

3

126 The phonograph had delighted Bayo from the first. When Apanto had summoned the spirit of his obia to fight the machine, Bayo had watched. When the white man's glue had repaired the broken belt, and the hot sun had made the machine "walk" once more, Bayo had approved.

"The machine is not weak," he had said. "I will sing for it."

And sing for it he did.

But the curse of Apanto still troubled the machine, for up the river and down there had been difficulty with it. Often when there was a particularly good song to be recorded, the belt would give, the machine would fail the white man. The story of the prowess of Apanto had gone up the river with the Gankwe paddlers, and when the machine stopped, heads nodded, and we would catch the word "obia" among the murmurs of the bystanders.

126 Bayo thought, it seemed, that the machine's proud
123 spirit was by this time properly chastened and, since twice
the machine had refused to work while he was singing into
782 it, twice had made him stop the song and its drum accom-
776 paniment, he decided to take matters into his own hands.

"White man," said Bayo, shortly after our return from up the river, "I will help the spirit of the machine. I will

call the great gods. Apanto's spirit is strong, but Bayo has 126
strong gods, too." 123

The machine was made ready for him, and Bayo sat 782
down on a convenient box, his head bent over the tumao 776
drum which we had acquired and which his fingers could scarce ever be near but that they played on it.

"It is not the right drum," he said. "You should have an apinti for me to speak to the gods. But I will try it with this one. Tomorrow I will go up the river to Djamungo. I know a man who has an apinti. You will give me money, and I will buy it for you. But now I will speak on the tumao."

He began the irregular tapping which we had learned to 202
identify as the drum language. With one hand he carried 534
the message, while with the other he played irrelevant 782
motifs which served to confound anyone not initiated and leave him, as it left us, who had worked out some of the general principles on which this drum language was based, utterly unable to interpret it or to tell which were the significant elements.

"The great gods will look after your machine now, if they [776]
will listen to the tumao."

The next day Bayo went upstream to get us the apinti 126
we so desired. He was not successful, but the gods had 782
listened to him, when he had invoked them on the tumao, 776
for Bayo's ministrations ended all trouble with our re- 177
calcitrant phonograph. Bayo indeed had strong spirits!

As the days went on, and record after record was put on the turntable, and with its tracing of songs, or examples of Bush Negro speech, or fragments of the rhythms that called the various gods, was taken off and carefully put into its felt-lined box, Bayo visibly swelled with pride. This was his doing! With his strong spirits he had called the great gods! He was young, and he had not spoken on the proper drum, but they had listened to him! So his thoughts went, and so he would repeat them to us.

His interest in the phonograph was intensified the more he saw of it, and he sang and spoke and drumned, either

126 alone or with some friend, into the wax cylinders that
782 spoke back in such mysterious fashion. When Apanto came
776 to visit us, Bayo smiled as he saw the obia man approaching
177 from the landing place.

"His obia is strong, but mine is strong, too. Let him sing into the machine."

Apanto was visibly surprised when he saw in operation the machine his spirit had wrecked. "The machine is not weak, Apanto," we assured him. "It has its own strength, and now it has the strength your gods have given it. For in the true, true Saramacca, a great obia man spoke his message to the Great God into it, and since then it has walked well with us."

Out of the corners of our eyes, we could see Bayo's pride.
126 "Sing for us, Apanto," we urged, for he had a beautiful
533 voice. "Sing us an Apuku song."

Now Apanto sang, not once, but many times. It is true that when we asked for Apuku he sang Vodu, and when we asked for Vodu he sang Toné, and when we asked for Toné he sang Kromanti songs, and when we asked for Kromanti he sang the sacred dirges called "Papa" songs. Yet this was not otherwise than might be expected, and it was not too difficult to play the records to interested men of other villages, whose startled comments would soon tell us the kind of song he had sung.

It was another day when Apanto again sang, and some of these who had witnessed his first victory were about. One such addressed himself to Bayo, who was sitting near.

"Apanto's spirit fought the machine, and stopped it.
[776] But the machine works and sings back to Apanto. Its
strength has come back to it."

"Awa, Apanto's spirit is strong," we heard Bayo reply, "but there are other strong spirits on the Saramacca."

4

302 Bayo had spent the night at Gankwe, and had returned
115 resplendent with a new hairdressing. We joked with

him about it as he came to take the white man through 302
the bush trails to a neighboring village. 115

One of the girls who admired him had achieved this, but how she had managed to make the minute braids was difficult for us to see, for Bayo's hair the day before, long for him, had not seemed sufficiently yielding to permit of braiding. Yet here he was, his head covered with innumerable small braids which divided the white scalp into sections and showed lines where the many regular parts had been made. This made quite a new man out of Bayo. He was no longer the warrior who went without food because
he was bored with the idea of preparing the food—a [562]
woman's task or, at best, that of an old man like his great- [887]
grandfather Bibifo who had cooked on the up-river trip. Now he was a dandy.

"Ai-yo!" he crowed back as we speculated on the labor that had gone into the creation. "It took her almost all the night! It is hard work."

"She must like you, Bayo."

"She likes me well, ai!"

"Are you going to have her for your third wife?"

"Who knows? But a man doesn't marry every woman who braids his hair."

Soon Bayo and the white man were off through the bush, 484
Tross going ahead as scout. Back and across the path he 231
would dart and for the white man, unaccustomed to the sounds of the bush, it was difficult to tell whether the rustling he heard was caused by the dog, or by the small animals stirred up from time to time. Once a snake coiled on the path moved lazily away as they approached; Tross had disturbed it, and the snake had no mind for more encounters. Once a small animal of some sort dashed across the trail ahead, the dog in close pursuit, and for some moments we could hear them tearing through the underbrush.

"Aren't you afraid that some animal will hurt Tross, Bayo?"

"He is a good dog. And I have put strong obia on him." [789]

115 Bayo knew the bush as he knew the river. At one point
584 he stopped and, clipping off a long, slender branch with
his bush knife, he trimmed it and began to strike at a palm
tree. He was after maripa nuts, and soon they began to
[262] pelt the ground. Their pink, slightly astringent meat was
highly prized by the Bush Negroes as a delicacy, and the
white man also found them good. Both munched them
as they walked farther into the bush. It was a good time
to speak of Bayo's marriage.

"Your mother said you needed to work hard before marrying."

"Ai."

"Is it money you need?"

"Much money, and goods besides."

"What will your girl do with all this money, and all of these goods?"

"They are not all for her. She would have me without them. It is her mother who must get things, too."

That Bayo was attractive to women, we had often seen, but that his betrothed would have him without the wealth demanded for her by right of whatever position her family held, seemed doubtful. However, this was not the time to argue the point.

"Your girl is still young. Do girls her age know enough to choose a man?"

The question brought us to the story of how Bayo became betrothed.

His girl, he told us, was of good family. She had lived in his village, because her mother at marriage had come to live with her husband at Djamungo, but a few years after Bayo had become betrothed to the girl, his mother's sister took her away to the family seat up the river.

"Do you care for your girl, Bayo?"

"*M'an sabi, Bak'a*—I do not know. We shall see how we
[831] get on. But her family is good, and they are looking after
her chastity, as families who have position do."

"What if you don't get on after you are married?"

586 "We will separate. She will go back to her own family.
Sometimes, if a man doesn't like a woman too much, and

she doesn't make children, then he can send her back. But most often it is the woman who goes away." 586

When the wife left the home her husband had built for her and went to her family, he had to go to her village and plead for her return, while her relations berated him soundly for his behavior toward their kin. If he had not mistreated her badly, the family would urge her to return to him, and so great would that pressure be that she would have to go. But Bayo again repeated that this did not happen often. If a woman left her husband and he failed to come for her, they were divorced. She could not remarry until three months had passed. [587]

But Bayo was more interested in marriage than in divorce, and the talk again turned to his betrothal. 584 115

His mother and her brothers had decided upon the match. His uncles had gone to the family of the girl, and talked with her mother's brothers. Her people called a family krutu to decide whether Bayo was qualified to be a suitable husband for this young member of their family.

"Were you there?"

"No. It was a krutu of her family. But I know how they talk at these krutu, for when my sister was promised in marriage my own family had a krutu, and I sat and listened. Anybody who knew anything bad about my brother-in-law or his family told of it. They talk much at these krutu. The woman you met at Djamungo talked when the men talked, and she talked when the women talked," he finished with a laugh, as though it were a relief to him to know that at least she had had no say when his girl's family had gathered to look into his own family position, and his personal habits of work, and the gifts the gods had given him. 584 115 623

At this krutu of the girl's family, Bayo had, however, been thoroughly discussed. Was he a good worker? Could he hunt well? How did he behave in strange villages? At his initiation had the gods come strong to him? Had he done anything that his wife's family would later be ashamed of?

The white man wondered about the kunu which hung over Bayo's family, the kunu of incest, the deadliest of all 776

776 kunu, which must kill his children. Was it safe to mention it? A chance question was asked.

"Nothing will happen to my children, Bak'a. They will [604] belong to my wife's family. It is my sister's children that things will happen to."

Bayo paused for a moment on the path, and stood in thought. Was it that he wished to be entirely honest with his friend? Was it that to confess the truth was too difficult for him? Whatever the reason, his next remark indicated a compromise.

"Nothing will happen to my children. Those of my younger brother will die, but not mine."

584 The conversation came back to the less painful subject of betrothal. Whatever the reason for accepting this boy whose kunu brought such supernatural risk, the match had apparently been satisfactory to the family of the girl, and they had sent word that the marriage would not displease them.

"Now I am earning the money I need, and later I will make the things I must give my girl and her family."

583 There was, first of all, the work to be done for Bayo's prospective mother-in-law. He might have to help her with repairs on her house, or assist her in clearing a field. Before he was married he would have to go into the bush and cut the two fields for his wife, one for rice and one for cassava, which a married woman must have, and in addition he would have to cut an extra field for the mother of his wife.

"I must do it so they can be sure that I am strong, and can take care of their girl when I marry her. But I will not have any trouble!"

Before that, however, Bayo would have to see to the carvings which a man had to have for marrying.

"I do not like to carve. But I have friends who will [439] carve for me while I go hunting for them!" That was the way to solve such difficulties. When the carvings were assembled he would have to make a boat for his girl. Bayo was not yet certain, but he thought that another boat would have to be made for his mother-in-law. Then houses would have to be built—one in his village Then where 584 they would live, and one in the provision ground for [342] his wife to sleep in when she worked in the field.

"Must you yourself build the house, Bayo?"

"My family will help me. Making a house is hard work, [496] too, and a man must have clever fingers for weaving the [462] walls."

There would have to be stools, and several well-ornamented combs. A clothes beater would have to be provided for the bride, and a peanut pounding board, and one mortar and pestle at least, and food stirrers and rice trays. A cassava squeezer would have to be woven, and a sifter and grater for the roots that were made into bread. And baskets, too, he would have to weave.

"This is not all. This is only what I must make. Other things I must buy for her."

He would have to provide cloths when the wedding day [585] came, and cloths for his mother-in-law, too. The small [342] kerchiefs which were folded in triangular shape and were worn about the waist as the sign that a woman was married he would also have to furnish, and two large cloths, each the size of three tunics. He would have to buy an iron cooking pot, and some small fishhooks with lines, and some cups from the white man's city. He was going to give his girl a pair of earrings, and a string of beads. Then there would have to be the hammock.

Bayo laughed, "For a marriage, there must be a hammock."

There were other things he was going to buy for his girl. Brass arm and leg ornaments he would buy, since his girl was already a fine dancer.

And when all these things were bought and given, then it was time for the marriage.

"But it doesn't always happen that the marriage takes place," said Bayo. "Sometimes the girl's people do not like what the man has done. They have another krutu, and decide the man should not marry into their family."

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231

Bayo and Tross.

227
411
891

Bow and arrow used for shooting large fish.

[Facing p. 302]

(Facing page 302)

584 This was a disgrace. A man was not looked upon as a good suitor by other girls when this happened to him. Everyone said he was worthless. It often came to pass that such a man could not get a woman to marry him. Not even a widow whose husband had left no brothers, and who
[587] had to cut her own field, would consent to live with him.

Sometimes it happened, too, that the man's family did not approve of the girl. When she came to help his mother, they saw that she was lazy and inept, that she would never be able to feed herself and her husband and her children with what crops she raised, that whatever handiwork she touched, she could achieve nothing pleasing. If that happened, then his family met in krutu, and a decision was reached to break off the match. When that was done, the man often had to forfeit the gifts he had made the girl and her mother, but when the woman's family turned the man down, then they came with all the gifts he had given, and often an additional offering as well for what labor he had done for her family.

"With me it is not so. My family likes my girl, and hers likes me."

585 When the gifts were accumulated and the houses and boats and fields provided, then, if the girl was ripe for marrying, the marriage day was set, and on that day the girl was brought to the house where she would live. Both families were gathered in the village, and the uncles and old women addressed themselves to the young couple, admonishing them to live well together, and to observe the traditional ways.

At night while the villagers danced bandamba, and
[262] feasted on the rum and salt beef and other delicacies which the man and his family had provided, the couple were led to the house which had been newly built for them, though sometimes they were taken to the house of one of the old people of the man's great family. In Bayo's village, the girl first was conducted to the house by a sister who helped her make the preparations for the night. They tied the hammock and then water was brought. This done, the man

was called, and the couple were left alone, while outside the villagers danced and sang of fertility all night. 585

In the morning the man's brothers come to the house to find out if she had ever before been to the hammock with another man. 831 585 626

"What happens if they find that she has?"

Bayo's reply was prompt. "Usually nothing. The man doesn't give her as many presents as he would have given her. If he had promised her thirty pangi, he would only give her fourteen. If he liked her, he wouldn't turn her away."

"What would happen to her, though? Would they punish her?"

"They say, Bak'a, sometimes a man likes her better for it. It shows him other men had cared for her. But her family scolds her, and sometimes punishes her, too, and the women of the village talk plenty. They pull their lip at her the next morning, and later, whenever there is a quarrel, they talk about it again."

But if the girl were found to have been a virgin, then all the people danced, and there was a great feast, with dances to all the gods.

"You must come back for my wedding, Bak'a, you and your woman. Then you will see dancing!" 585

"But your girl is still a child, Bayo."

"Ah, no. She is getting her cuts on her thighs. She wears a cloth." He knew, because on his way down from the Granman he had stopped at her village and when the family was not about he had made sure. "If you come next year, we will both be ready." 881

The two men still followed the bush trail when Bayo had finished his account of how the marriage was conducted. Now and then Tross would appear, wag his tail, and be off into the underbrush again. 000

"Tell me, Bayo," the white man began, "do many girls go with a man to the hammock before they are married?" 836

He waited for a moment before he answered. Smiling, he ran his hand over his newly braided head with the innumerable little braids between the lines of white.

"About half of them, I guess," he said.

000 "About half of them, I guess," he said.

5

524 609 When we returned to camp, Kasanya waited for us. He had come with the game boards he had promised to make for us, the adji game which was played in the house of death, and which the fine carver in Kasanya's village could not make because he was young, and a man needed to have a wife under the sod before he was fitted to make it.

Kasanya had taught the white man to play the game the year before, and though the white man had had much practice in playing it at home, Kasanya won one game after the other with ease.

524 609 562 With the white woman he would not play, nor would any other man—not even Bayo who showed so much indulgence toward the strangers. It was this way, Kasanya explained. A man knew that a woman could not beat him at the game, much less a woman who did not have the cunning of their bush, and would not, therefore, be expected to excel in what pertained to the life of the bush. But if the gods became capricious and allowed the white woman to win, then it would be more than a man could bear to be twitted up and down the river about it. Songs would be made up about it, and stories and proverbs. Master Nigger! A man would be a fool to risk it.

524 When Kasanya had gone, Bayo came back from Gankwe where, it seemed, his errands now took him daily. The sun was still high enough so that a game might be played before the hovering ghosts who in life had enjoyed the game would [MS] take their places beside the players, and play unseen at this game board with the living.

"Do you play adji, Bayo?"

"*Awa! Suma no de!*—Sure! No one better!"

But it soon appeared that Bayo had brought too much self-confidence with him from Gankwe. He was promptly beaten, and beaten again.

"*Suma de, Bayo?*—Someone better?"

The boy grinned,
"Suma de, ai," he acknowledged.

000

"Suma de, ai," he acknowledged.

6

Bayo remained in the bush, but he did not come to the city with us, though he took us into the Awka villages as captain of our boat. While at the base camp, he busied himself with making small models of traps and snares, and whatever other examples of Bush Negro work we needed to augment our collection. 115

He was a poor weaver, for he was no craftsman at all. But on the river he showed almost superhuman strength, and his knowledge of obia and the gods showed his potentialities for achieving what he most desired—to become an obia man. It may well be that his great kunu had planted this ambition in him. Perhaps, if he became a renowned obia man, one of the greatest on the river, he would outwit the combined power of ancestors and gods. His physical strength was such that all seemed possible to him, and his eye was quick, his curiosity unbounded. As a child of incest, a twofold member of his clan, he had certain immunities from the gods, though his line would all the more be flayed by the punishment which his parentage had earned. [591] [142] [152]

"White man," he would say to us, "the next time you come, I will go with you to Africa. By then, I shall have given my wife children, and my sister's children will be grown. I want to go to Africa to learn obia."

His young brother was not strong. Bayo allowed them to cut no kamemba on the boy, who was now almost eleven, and it was clear that he would not be able to go through the Kromanti initiation, that he would have few gods. [304] [575]

"What will you do then, Bayo?"

God alone knew. He did not expect that even in Africa he could learn all he needed to know to help his young brother.

"Would he go with Bibifo?" we ventured, remembering that Bibifo had become Adrian.

He laughed. The white man asked many questions.

115 As we sat and talked with him, we learned much of his life. His father had died soon after he was born. His mother was still alive, but she was poor, and life was a burden to her. His shortcomings in all that required discipline and technique were directly traceable to the kunu, and so were the deaths of his father, and several of his uncles. He had been obliged to be his own master, to get his food as best he could. His gods came to him early, and long before his initiation he used to show evidence that his Tiger spirit would be strong. But it was not entirely his lack of training which was at fault. His uncle's spirits, too, were powerful in matters of obia, but they had not vouchsafed him any skill in carving or weaving.

Perhaps it was the exigencies of life as an orphan, whose family was plagued as well with the greatest kunu of all, that had given to Bayo's perceptions an amazing quickness. When people were puzzled about the nature of our work, Bayo decided that it was a type of white man's obia. The white man's desire to gain knowledge not for gold, but for its own sake, was not unlike the seeking of the good obia man who did not become rich by his labors. Later, when we spoke of what he had told us of ceremonies and ceremonial life with men who were older, men versed in the lore of their people, we were astonished at the grounding the boy had in his own civilization.

115
152 If he was boisterous, somewhat boastful with us, it was not difficult to understand the motivation. It was his urge to assert himself. But among his own people, particularly when he was with older men, he walked "softly," as he himself said. Yet men twice his age saw to it that they did not "rile" the boy.

"When Bayo gets his Tiger spirit, Bak'a, he is not the boy you know. Be on your guard. He is young, but when his Tiger spirit comes, he can kill."

Chapter XVII

SARAMACCA OBIA

1

NO WORD of African origin which has survived in the New World has taken on such grim meaning as has the word *obia* in many of the islands of the Caribbean. No Negro there will speak of it, and its practices and properties are secret. When obia strikes in the islands, it is usually a matter for the government, and the forms its vengeance knows too often take a grisly turn. [789 771]

In the life of the Bush Negro, however, obia is everywhere, and its name the commonest of bywords, for among the Suriname Negroes obia is not black magic, or witchcraft, or sorcery. Black magic [in the Suriname bush is *wisi*, and wisi is never confounded in the Bush Negro's mind with obia. [754]

"Obia is good. Obia heals," they say in Suriname.

"Obia warns, obia protects."

"Obia protects a man against the force of a bullet, the thrust of an iron weapon, the dangers of fire."

"You want to know what obia is, Massa?" our cook asked one day. "We have this *komfo singi*—this priest's song: [533 539]

"I am no master,
And I am no slave,
Yet when the masters come,
They carry water for me."

789 776 This, he went on to explain, had the meaning that obia was not so great as the very great gods, and it was not to be ranked with the lesser deities who served as emissaries for the great gods, yet when the great gods wanted to help mankind, it was through obia that they healed and purified, it was to obia that men were instructed to turn.

773 776 It seems that when the Sky God created the Earth Mother and the Mother of the River, he also created man and beast. Man had a poor time of it, pitting himself against the forces of earth and sky and water. And so that man might survive, the Sky God had had to send obia into the world to help man. Obia was not a god, it was a spirit. It gave people knowledge of herbs which cured, and herbs which prevented sickness. Obia warned of danger, and made known those properties of earth and water and air which healed and calmed. 787 789 Obia taught the use of the band of metal on the arm, or the string about the waist which forewarned of evil, and made man wary and alert.

After obia came into the world, the Sky God sent Akantamasu, the god of the ant hill, to plague man. Perhaps obia had made of man an overbearing creature, defiant even against the great gods, so that the Sky God brought the Akantamasu spirit into being to teach him humility.

The answer of the Bush Negro was, of course, that so it was, and so it had been long ago, but why, he did not know. The Sky God had willed it so, and the Sky God was so far from man that he never vouchsafed explanations to human beings, and they in turn rarely taxed him to ease their bewilderment.

769 775 776 There was also the power of the ancestors, but our Bush Negro friends were never certain as to how they ranked in the supernatural hierarchy. Some said they ranked after the Earth Mother and the Mother of the River, that they were greater than obia, because the ancestors punished as well as helped mankind, and when angered their punishment came swifter than that of the powerful Akantamasu gods. Others said the ancestors were greater than obia, because obia had been given to the ancestors long ago,

and it was they who in dream or vision, or in a state of 769
possession, instructed living men in the ways of yet greater [787]
and greater obia. But there were those who held that obia 775
ranked after the greatest of the deities, that obia surpassed 776
the power of the ancestors, for obia knew how to make "*yorka tapu*"—preventives against troublesome ghosts, and obia men could summon the dead to enter the body of a living man to make revelations.

Whatever the position of obia in the supernatural world, its place on earth was to serve man, for of all living beings, man alone knew obia.

2

What were the manifestations of obia in the life of the 789
Bush Negro as we found them? 778

A black pot with its magic powers was an obia pot, the [415]
charm worn about the neck was called an obia, the medicines we gave the natives for their eyes or their cuts were called white man's obia, and their own mixture of weeds steeped [278]
in water, which stood in the burning sun gathering a green scum until it should be ready for use, was also obia. Young Yamati who had danced susa for us did not have a cord about his neck, but, he had assured us, he had obia for long life as did his partner Sabape, though his own could [304]
not be seen, since it consisted of several obia cuts made shortly after birth, which served instead of the cord. The strings about the waists of children were obias. The slight cuts to be noticed on men's arms, on thighs, below the knee, below the shoulder blades were obia cuts, too.

Nor was that all.

Bayo had said to us, "When obia comes a man does 776
bad things. He destroys. When mine comes, it is ugly 789
sometimes."

It was obia, too—Apanto's obia—which had stopped our phonograph, and obia again, invoked this time by Bayo, which had strengthened the spirit of the machine.

We talked about obia to an elder, a village head, from one of the down-river settlements, which was not, however,

776 important enough to be the residence of a clan chief. His
789 clan's magic was strong, and, being well past middle age,
he could afford to speak of these matters with the whites,
for like all Bush Negroes he was proud of the black man's
obia.

"Ya-hai, white man, obia may well puzzle you. It is no
small matter. No man knows all there is to know about
obia. The greatest of obia men is never done learning. You
[791] say you spent more than twenty years learning your kind
of work. Twenty years is nothing. All his life an obia man
spends learning. The ancestors let him see a little at a time,
and a little more. 'One step at a time,' as the G'ama' says.
So it is, white man."

When did the learning begin, we asked him?

869 "In the bush here, children see what we do, and they
776 learn much by watching. They learn to recognize the kind
778 of obias a man wears, they learn to know the names of
obias, and about the *tchina*—taboos—that go with the
wearing of obias. That is the beginning." All children knew
that, but only boys could aspire to learn the secrets of obia.

A boy's definite training in these things began with
adolescence. The ceremony was not formal, for it concerned
only the boy and his immediate relatives. When the time
came to teach the novice about the gods, his father and
[604] his mother's brothers met with him, and they held a krutu.
Other men also came, men of the village and elders of their
great family. The outsiders sat by and said nothing, while
881 the instruction was carried on by the father and the boy's
maternal uncles.

869 "First the father gives him his gods, and he tells his son
776 the name of each god and how he must serve him."

There were songs to be learned and dances and invocations; there were the offerings which had to be made, and the manner of prayer memorized. He was told when he might call on the god and what names the god bore, for each god had several names, just as had each human being. There were many names to learn for the gods—their day names, their "strong" names.

So it was with each god, until the boy was ready to be 881
initiated into the Kromanti Society. 869

"There are many, many krutu, white man, for a boy has 776
much to learn."

When those who directed the krutu were satisfied that the boy had learned how to serve the gods he had been given, that he knew their powers, and those things which were hateful to them and would incur their displeasure, then a dance was held for him so that he might demonstrate before the assembled festive villagers that he was ready for manhood.

"We give a big play for a boy who gets his gods for the first time. When the gods come to him at this dance at the bidding of the drum, and he dances hard, then his family is pleased. When a boy dances, then we know what is in him. We know whether his gods are strong, whether he is to be feared."

Once the father had transferred his gods to his son, he 886
did not dance much himself. He might continue to play the 869
drum at sacred dances, but dancing and drumming were 776
for the younger men. His son's worship of the gods through [535]
the dance released the father for the study of obia. With [533]
the governing elders, the father took up his rôle as a clan member who sought the will of the ancestors when new tasks were to be undertaken.

"What happens if the father has few gods to give his son?" we asked.

"Then his mother's eldest brother gives his to the boy." [604]

"What if the boy's uncle has none to give?"

That happened so seldom that he could not remember such an instance, but he had heard it said that this had occurred once or twice.

"A man must have gods to help him live. If his family 437
can give him none, then they buy gods for him. Sometimes 776
there are gods in the family that are not too strong, and 424
they want the boy to have strong gods. They go to a man who knows about such things and who himself has strong gods and buy a god for the boy from him."

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776 A man who wished to buy a god for his son went to a
432 renowned obia man and agreed to pay him a certain sum
424 of money if, at the end of the period of training, the god
came to the boy.

"When the obia man says the boy is ready, they give a
dance. At this dance, the drum is played for the god, and
[787] the boy must dance. If the god comes to him, then the
obia man gets his money, but if the god does not come,
then he does not get what was promised him, because they
had made an agreement for a god, and no god came."

881 The training was not very difficult—it was not like the
869 training for becoming an obia man. A boy was given obia
water to wash in. Every eight days the water in the obia
776 pot was changed, and this bathing continued for three
moons. When the ritual of purification was over, he was
[783] taught the drum rhythms of the god, the invocations which
the drum sounded, and the spoken invocations. Songs,
and make-up for the dancing, and the dancing itself he was
taught, and when he might call upon the god, and what he
must do when the god comes, and what offerings the god
was to receive. If the god spoke "tongues," he was also
instructed in the appropriate language. There were the
words of the mocking little Apuku gods and the sounds
which only Toné people made, and there was the "Kromanti
tongo."

"Can all the gods be bought?" we asked.

432 "Kweti, kweti!" he shook his head in emphatic denial.
776 "The river gods cannot be bought. You are born a Toné
789 man or woman, or the Toné god comes to you from your
family. But all the Vodu gods you can buy; and the god
Bongo, the alligator; and the ant hill gods and the gods of
the kankan tree, and the Apuku bush gods." He paused for
an instant, as if he were considering something. "And
men buy Kromanti for their sons, if they have none to
give them. Almost every man in the bush has Kromanti.
If he hasn't it, then he tries to buy it for his sons. A man
needs Kromanti. When he has the Kromanti spirit, fire
cannot hurt him, nor glass, nor anything that cuts—

anything made of iron—nor can a gun shoot him, nor an 432
arrow pierce him. If he goes through a thicket of thorns 776
or climbs a thorny palm tree when the spirit comes to him, 789
he is not harmed. That is Kromanti."

"How much does a person pay an obia man for giving a boy Kromanti?" we asked.

"It costs plenty, white man. But a good obia man never [435]
asks too much. If a man says he will give the boy Kromanti, for not too many guilders, then we know he will do it. But if a man asks forty, fifty, then we know he is not an honest man, and he is not a good man. I have heard, though, of a good obia man who took as much as twenty-four guilders, but he gave the boy a strong Kromanti spirit, and it took much time to teach him."

3

From time to time members of Bayo's family visited 791
our camp. Each time we were introduced to a new brother, or father, or *suwagi*—brother-in-law. Among these visitors was a man whose name we never learned, though we had talked with him a good deal. He was, we later came to know, a man who knew obia. He was a scholar among his people, a thoughtful man who often went about alone, instead of being accompanied by a fellow clan member or a member of his family, as is customary among these people. Like Bayo, he had an incest kunu, and at his age,
he had already had occasion to see what kunu planned for 791
him. He coughed badly. When men went to cut timber, 164
he could not go with them because of his cough and the fever which went with the cough.

"Have you been to a good obia man?" we asked him.

He smiled. Of what use to go from one diviner to the next,
from one man who had special magic to another, when a [753]
man knew that what was troubling him was kunu?

"Come to the city with us," we said, when we knew him better, "and we will take you to a doctor. He may be able to do something for you."

791 753 789 792 He promised readily enough to go with us, but Bayo told us later that he would not come.

"He says the white doctor cannot do more than obia can do. He says a man must take what kunu brings."

Was there no obia against kunu? we asked of Bayo.

"No, but kunu is not greater than obia. It is something else. When the Sky God gave obia to man, he gave it to help man live, not to help him do bad things. When men [688] and women earn a kunu for their family, it is because they do what is hateful to the great gods and ancestors. Obia was not sent to save men from punishment."

"Does obia never punish, Bayo?" We were thinking of what he said about his own obia, of how when it seized him, he destroyed things.

But he would say no more. "I am too young, Bak'a, to [888] speak of these things. At my age I know only a little obia. You must ask the old men."

4

554 791 The conversation led us one day to the obia men on the river. They were, we knew, important persons in the Bush Negro communities. An obia man of reputation was not only consulted by his own villagers and clansmen, but men and women came to him from distant villages, when those who were nearer had failed them. It occurred sometimes that even from the Awka villages on the lower river, these Saramacca obia men were sought out—perhaps this was because of the same tradition which encouraged the buying of strange gods to enlarge the family pantheon, perhaps it was because of something which touched still deeper beliefs.

868 867 How did a man become an obia man?

From what we had already heard, it was apparent that here was something which approached the formal education of our own civilization, a form of education, indeed, which we pride ourselves is unique to our own way of life.

All other knowledge the Bush Negro child gains by being about with members of his family who are busy at

the tasks which will fall to his lot when he reaches adult- 868
hood. Half in play, the boys and girls help their elders and 867
in that way learn how to work, how to conduct themselves,
how to sing and dance, how to make cicatrizations, and
how to pray to the gods. What they learn when they come
by their gods is also taught them by members of their
family. A boy's father and maternal uncles instruct him
in the gods they give him. A girl is made familiar with the
will of her gods and their manner of worship when her
mother and her mother's sisters give their gods to her.
Knowledge is, therefore, shared in the family and much
of it, the Bush Negro says, comes to each individual from
his gods, since not every boy who watches a fine carver
can rival the carving of his teacher. When he does show
promise of excellence at a given task, it is because he, too,
has a god who helps him do his carving. It is the same with
drumming, and singing, and telling stories, and making
love.

But obia is learned formally and slowly. An obia man 791
may teach his own brother, or his sister's eldest son, or 869
his own son, even, what he knows, but the learning process 881
will be gradual, for no man may disclose too much to an
untrained mind. At times, however, an obia man trains
men who are not related to him. He may himself decide
upon a young man of promise to whom he cares to impart
his knowledge. A considerable sum of money may be offered
him by members of an influential family who wish to
have an obia man of their own kin and who send a young
man to him for training. In a dream or during possession
it may become known that the ancestors wish a certain
young man to apprentice himself to the obia man they
name.

The apprenticeship lasts from three months to a year. 756
The novice goes to live with the obia man, working with 791
him and observing all that his master does. During this 868
period of intensive training he goes with the obia man 881
into the bush and is shown the herbs which heal. He is
trained in the manner of bathing for the *ak'a*—the soul—

756 and how to cure fever, and fio-fio. He is shown how to make
791 obia medicine for lesions of the skin, and for colds, and for
868 diseases of children. He is taught the protective obias for
881 the woman who conceives, and those which help conception, the obias which keep people safe on the river, and those which guard them in the bush against enemy spirits.

It may be, too, that during this first period of training, the initiate is shown how to trap and treat the snakes from which the snake "cuttee" is made. This cure for snake bite is famous in Suriname among Bush Negroes and whites alike, but the secret of preparing the cuttee is known to the Bush Negroes alone.

While the young man is in training, he may not go with
[784] a woman, and there are many more prohibitions which he must observe.

"Not all men can become obia men."

"Does a man need obia in order to have Kromanti?" we asked.

"To have Obia Kromanti, yes. . . . Now do not ask about Kromanti, white man," said Bayo's uncle with a smile. "Only a Kromanti man knows about Kromanti. Do not ask, because I cannot tell you."

5

789 Men and women constantly drifted to our base camp with
439 carvings for our collection. Many brought us obias. Some
778 of these obias they took from their persons and sold to us, but others were newly made for us, for some of those they themselves wore, they would not part with, whatever the inducement.

"Why do you want my obia, white man?" a Bush Negro asked one day. "Do you want an obia to carry you well to your country? I will make one for you, but do not ask for mine. Mine has kept me in good health. I cannot give away an obia which has served me well. The spirits would be angered."

He returned after a day with one which resembled his own, and as he gave it, he placed it on the upturned palms

of the white man and blew on it, drawing both his hands 789
lightly over the hands which held the obia. When he had 439
done this, he whispered its tchina. 778

"Do not let the obia come near a menstruating woman, [841]
and do not eat the meat of the crab." [262]

Types of obias varied. Some were of fiber twisted into a cord and woven into bands to fit an arm or a leg, some were worn around the neck, and ended with a few cowries and a bell or a black sack with cowries sewn on them or some bristles and a brilliant bit of a parrot's feather. There were also the plain bands of iron, the Kromanti obias worn by men.

One of the most interesting obias was the coffin obia. It was not to be worn casually, as were all the others we had heretofore acquired. When our cook saw this one he paled.

"Mi Gado," he cried, and then turned to the English at his command to give us a warning which would not be understood by those who stood near. "What you got there? Put that away! You wan' fo' die?" Nor would he come near it until it was well out of sight.

It was, we saw, best hidden, if we wanted to continue our course up the river.

The man who had sold it had himself impressed us with
its potency. "This obia is strong. . . . Look, it is made of [764]
cedar, the same wood from which we make the big coffins, and it is wrapped in the cloth we use to cover the coffin in which the dead man lies. Now that you have the power which is in the obia, I can tell you that the black on it is the soot from the fire, the white is pemba, and the inside ring is woven from the maripa palm. It will carry you well on the river. Nothing can harm you when you already carry your coffin with you."

The logic of his last remark was not so convincing to the whites as it was to the obia man, but it seemed unwise to question him about it.

"To keep it strong, you must spray it with rum twice a month. When the moon is full you must do it, and again

789 before the new moon comes, and when you do this, you
778 must say,

439 "*Obia-o,*
Your spirit must stay,
[539] *Your power must not leave this.*
Do not go elsewhere,
Do not become defiled."

789 There was the obia on which Bayo had lavished all the
778 magic he could command so that his friends might be
safe in the bush. From the sacred grass known as *s'a*—the
same grass from which the woven ceremonial dancing
skirts are made here on the river—he made several long
lengths of twine. These he wove into a square which later
became the pendant of this neck obia. On this, as a base,
he sewed two cowries facing each other, and in the middle
of the fringed border of this pendant he fastened a bit of a
macaw's feather, blue and orange in color.

The twisted cord about the neck had several knots in it
where the cord met the pendant. Tying is the symbol of
attaching, of binding, so that if an invocation was uttered
in the making of these knots, and the twine was then
drawn taut, the power was certain to be lodged inside the
knots. Then, too, knots form links, and links, whether they
be in a metal chain or in fiber or wood, symbolize union,
and any object or ornament with links is, therefore, much
valued in bush and in town. A linked chain is a favorite
[775] gift to please the akra, the soul, among the coastal Negroes.
A woman who wishes to attach her man to her will rise at
[832] night noiselessly and will knot a hair from the man's head
three times, speaking her invocation. In the bush few obias
are found which do not have several knots in them.

In his exuberance Bayo placed so many prohibitions on this finely woven obia, that we asked him if he could not nullify some of them.

784 "For very strong obias, we have many tchina. It is best
789 so, because no one who wants to harm you will guess all
of them and so succeed in robbing the obia of its power.

But if the tchina are too difficult to observe, then the man 784
who made the obia can take the tchina away." 789

Suiting his action to the word, Bayo took some water from the river into his mouth and, spraying it over the obia, said, "The tchina I gave you, I take away. The breaking of these tchina must no longer defile you or take away your power."

There was nothing more hateful to the gods and the 784
spirit of obia than an unclean woman, yet if an obia man 841
wished, he could instruct the power in the obia not to take 791
offense at unintentional contacts with menstruating women, 789
or at cloths belonging to such women, or at food prepared by such women. But to accomplish this, an obia man had to be very powerful and, even so, he could not feel sure that the obia spirit would countenance such violations indefinitely.

All of these personal obias had definite attributes. One 789
was made to guard an individual on the water, another in 778
the bush. There were obias for successful hunting and fishing, for being safe against the evil spirits at the crossroads, for slander, and for envy. One obia saw to it that the soul remained strong, another that no illness sent by an enemy might lodge itself in the body of the wearer; there were love obias, and fighting obias, and obias which kept ghosts away.

Yet whatever such obias were made of, the object in itself had no validity. A simple fiber with a jaguar's tooth attached to it might well have greater powers for safety in the bush than an elaborately wrought obia, whose maker had not a strong obia spirit to give it spiritual power. Without this supernatural potency, it would be like a village god that had been allowed to rot because of itself it was merely a block of wood, and the deity for whom it had been made had not come to animate it.

6

Long ago, the Anansi stories tell us, there was a bird 773
that knew obia. The cries of this bird shook all the kingdoms

773 of the earth. In one kingdom, a ruler sent the heralds to proclaim throughout the land that he who killed the bird would get half his kingdom, and his daughter in marriage. Anansi, the spider, killed a hawk and brought it to the ruler. But Anansi lied when he said this was the bird that shook the earth with its cries. At the very time he was trying to persuade all the people that this was the bird, the cries of the ominous bird were heard. So they put Anansi in jail. Now one day there was born to a woman a child who at birth wore a cloth of pieced designs, and a hunting sack. This boy said to his mother, he said, "Give me a little water, mother, and I will go out into the world to learn wisdom. God has sent me to kill the bird which troubles mankind."

When the boy grew to manhood he succeeded in trapping this bird that knew how to cook obia without fire. He killed the bird and took the obia pot with him, and that is how he came by the secrets of obia. He passed on his knowledge to the men of his family, and this has been going on till today, so that obia is being spread throughout the world by the descendants of this man who killed the bird that knew obia.

776 But obia was not one thing only.

"Obia," Bayo's uncle had said, "is first of all the spirit. It is everywhere. But there are many kinds of obia. There is black man's obia, and there is white man's obia. Here in the bush black man's obia is the strongest.

789 "A man who has the obia spirit makes obia to wear, and
778 obia to drink, and obia to rub the body with, and obia water
776 for bathing. [illegible] benches.
The spirit tells you how to do things, and it tells you what to do. When we say a man has strong obia, we [illegible] his spirit is strong."

756 The Bush Negro obia man, said Bayo to us one day, knew
751 the things the white doctor knew—he knew how to heal—
789 and he knew other things, too. He knew how to keep sickness away. The things an obia man gave for healing were

called obias. The charms he gave for warding off illness and 756 751 789
evil were obias, too.

"So we call all these things. But each obia has a name. Every charm I wear is an obia, but if I wore the one you are wearing, it would be a soul cord, an *ak'a titi*. One below the knee we call *asumani* in my village, and one for the wrist *afimu*. The one on the upper arm is named *ando*. But there are many names, and they are all obia, because inside them is the spirit obia which gives them power. When a man sells you an obia and passes its power on to you, he breathes on your hands as they hold the obia. When he does it, he gives you the obia spirit which went into the making of this obia. If he did not make it himself, the spirit was given him by the obia man, and he gives it to you."

Obia, then, is the spirit; obia is the preventive and 776 751 789
curing agent; obias are the charms that are worn by people to help them. Some have called these obias "fetiches," but even a slight understanding of them should be enough to bring the outsider to the realization that the object of itself is meaningless, and that it is only the power that has been given the charm that makes it effective.

Yet it is not strange that the importance of the fetich has 776 789
been overestimated, for if the visitor did not draw out the Bush Negroes about their gods and their theories of the universe, the existence of these higher powers would almost go unrecognized. For everywhere there are to be found obias guarding the village, obias screening paths, obias worn by the people. That they are important to the Bush Negro is obvious. But they are important for day-by-day existence, and they do not possess the overwhelming importance of the great spirits who control the universe.

Many of these charms came to us as tangible evidence of the belief in obia. Some of those we acquired were of a unique character because of the power that was latent in them, some because of the intricacy of their [illegible] all of them paled in interest and in arresting quality beside the Kromanti Mama that came to us one night in secret.

Chapter XVIII

"OBIA COMES!"

1

789 778 WHITE and gaunt and staring in the dim light, the Kromanti Mama rested on its whitened bench, and about it coiled a snake modeled from the same sacred clay.

It had come to us in stealth, and as we responded to the awe it inspired, we could not but wonder what had prompted the man who had brought it to reveal one of the most secret religious objects known to his people. He came late one night, his burden carefully wrapped so that no one might suspect what he carried. That night only, while in whispers he told us what it was and wherein lay its powers, was it out of those wrappings, for not alone during the remainder of our stay in the bush but while we were in the city, we were careful to respect the man's trust.

"When you take it to your white man's country, and some man sees it who has a Tiger spirit, he will shout the cry of the tiger. All who have Tigri are related. Wherever the Kromanti Mama goes, there the Tigri obia goes, too."

2

776 Obia, we were told, came into the world to heal and to warn and to protect mankind. Of all obia, Kromanti is the strongest. Why, then, is the Kromanti obia so feared?

The clue to an answer to this question lies in the behavior of the men to whom this obia comes when they are possessed with it. The man who is actuated by Kromanti obia is

feared by all who themselves do not have Kromanti. Obia 776
Kromanti warns and protects and heals, but its powers [575]
are only for those who belong to the Kromanti group.

Whether Kromanti is the African warrior society preserved in this bush, it is impossible to say. If this were the 575 case, then the definite military organization of many of the West African societies should be present. The military character of any group among the Bush Negroes could not even be hinted at, of course, without the greatest caution. In their descriptions of the Kromanti, our intimates among the Bush Negroes never indicated in any way the existence of such an organization. Even leading questions brought out only unqualified denials instead of the revealing answers "I do not know," or "Massa Gadu sabi." Yet there are undoubtedly secrets which Kromanti men do not share with outsiders, and we remembered that when a Kromanti man dies, he must be "separated" from the Kromanti group [766]
just as he is "separated" from his family and from his village.

About the very meaning of the word Kromanti there can 175
only be speculation. During the time of the slave trade, 599
there were two ports on the Gold Coast of Africa known as 567
Little and Great Coromantyne. From these ports came the slaves who, in the New World, were known as Coromantyne slaves. These slaves were so warlike, so prone to cause uprisings, that only English and Dutch colonies consented to buy them and in these colonies when slave rebellions broke out to alarm the white planters, they were led by the proud Coromantyne slaves.

It would not be strange, therefore, if the same term was 776
carried over into the free civilization of this bush to 575
typify the obia which protected and watched over the fighters who had won this freedom.

Other indications point to the same assumption. The strongest spirits of the Kromanti, those which inspire the greatest fear when they possess men of a village are Tigri and Djadja. Tigri is the jaguar, Djadja is often vaguely translated by our word "devil." If we again turn to the West African societies, we find that one of the most dreaded

776 915 of the secret societies which flourish there is the Leopard Society, and this African feline is not very different from the one which gives its name to the Tigri obia. Other societies which chastise and protect have often been designated as "devil" societies.

789 776 915 Kromanti is feared, then, because of the kind of preventive it is. The man to whom this obia comes cannot be harmed by bullets shot from guns, by glass, by swords that cut, or by thorns which lacerate. Such a man is protected in combat from the weapons of his enemies and from thorny barricades that might be raised against his attack. It is protection for the warriors, and when it comes, the warriors who have the obia do not hesitate to test their immunity and to try that of others. A friendly, unassertive man seized by the Tiger Kromanti is in the grip of a power which transforms him into a tiger. When obia comes in the sacred dances, it is Kromanti obia. The Bush Negroes do not dance for the healing, protecting spirit that is obia in general. It is too remote. But when they dance and Kromanti comes, the women often flee, and the men who do not have Kromanti discreetly disappear. Only those who have Kromanti have nothing to fear from the attacks of their fellows, for they are protected by the power common to them all—the power of being unharmed by machetes or guns.

575 346 What is inside the Kromanti obia houses we cannot say, for we were never permitted to enter them. When we recognized their presence in villages we visited, the fact that they were Kromanti houses was acknowledged, but we were never allowed even to inspect the outside closely, and we were never accorded permission to photograph one of these shrines.

From our informants we learned that inside these houses there are paintings on the walls in black and red, the Kromanti colors, and in the white of the sacred pemba. There were, we were told, whitened benches that had about their tops the grass skirt of a kind worn by the obia man when he danced.

In the Kromanti house, too, was the Kromanti Mama. But until our friend brought us the one he had made for us, with its attendant bench and modeled snake, we had only heard the term. 575 346

3

In the dim light of our oil lantern, we listened and wrote in our book, while our informant told us about the Kromanti Mama. 126

"You must take it down carefully," he said, "or it might harm you."

The figure on the top of the bench was named Agbo. This was the watchman, and to this figure came news of all impending evil. About the neck of the figure was a Kromanti fighting obia. A stout iron ring, with red and blue cloth tied about one-half of it, it rested near the base of the watchman. 789 778 532

The eyes of this watchman were its most arresting feature. They were represented by deep sockets, and the effect was heightened by the beak-like character of the nose. Two ears completed the head, and on the body breasts were modeled. It was the only piece of Bush Negro modeling we had ever seen. This most secret of art forms was evidently little practiced.

"The watchman sees all," said our informant, "the Kromanti Mama knows when there is something about that will harm. She tells the snake."

Coiled about its base, this snake was treated in the same realistic style. The head of the snake and its tail almost met at the side of the clay figure which it encircled.

"His name is Bimbawai," we were told.

The bench itself was not unlike the obia stools we had seen in the shrines of the gods. Its rectangular top, curving toward the center, was fastened to the two boards which formed the legs. Like other obia stools, it was difficult to tell whether, under the thick coating of white clay, the wood was carved or not. In one respect it differed from all others we had seen—the bench wore, fringe-like, a grass skirt of the kind worn by the *komfo*, the priests. This was suspended from the top of the bench, the cord going outside [352]

789 778 532 the space where the snake was modeled, but never touching it.

The man who was explaining the bench to us pointed once more to the snake. "It is not always lifeless as you see it here," he said.

When the snake came to life, trouble was brewing. It turned red, the color of blood, and all who came into the Kromanti house and saw it were warned of danger.

"How does the snake know when to come to life?"

[774] "It is Agbo, the guard, who tells the snake. When she tells him there is trouble, he turns red, and then we know."

Immunity as well as knowledge was afforded by the magical powers of this stool and its snake and the Kromanti Mama.

"A man who has Kromanti sits down on the stool, and puts Agbo on his head, and when he has done that, nothing can harm him."

[782] Thus is safety attained. But this only comes if the image has been propitiated by the Kromanti men. Rum, not of the sweet kind, must be offered it and prayers transmitted to its spirit on the drum which Kromanti recognizes—the apinti. If this is done, the Kromanti Mama will not lose its power, and the snake will continue to turn the warning color when danger threatens, and the bench will give protection to the men who have the Kromanti obia.

4

796 Not long after we had entered the bush we saw our first Kromanti dance. The people of several neighboring villages came to our base camp to dance for us. They asked, "Will you be afraid if the dancing brings Kromanti?" We told them we should welcome whatever spirits came.

Late that afternoon canoes brought people to our encampment for the festivities. [439] Some, with an eye to trade, had brought carvings and obias, and, as we sat and talked with them about what should be given for the pieces they offered us, we could watch the dance outside our open hut.

"OBIA COMES!"

Two boys, each armed with two sticks, were striking the flat top of a wooden bench called the *kwakwa*. There were other rhythms than the steady beat made by the concerted impact of the four sticks on the bench, but this set the time for the hand clapping and songs that accompanied the dances.

The young girls began the dancing. They were showing how well they could dance bandamba, and pair by pair they would take up the dance, the older women standing by, singing and watching closely to see how they controlled the muscles of their buttocks. When one girl showed clearly that she outdid her partner, we could see an old woman step between the dancing couples and put her arm about the shoulders of the better dancer, congratulating her with the crooning syllables, "Adoo! Adoo!"

As we went outside our hut, watching and joining in the applause, more and more people came up from the river, and among them were some older boys carrying drums. These were not the regular drummers, but an evening is long, and the sun had not yet set. This was the time for the younger boys to gain practice in drumming the intricate rhythms of the dances.

The drumheads tightened to give the proper tones, the boys began to play, and, with the kwakwa, swung into rhythms of the seketi. We had already seen it at Gankwe when they danced for the dead man, but there were always new words to these popular tunes, and these words were often diverting.

Slowly the sun set, slowly the dusk came on. The singing and dancing, the drumming and hand clapping continued without intermission, as people came up the path from the river bank. These late comers were almost all men. Some of them we had seen at the Gankwe funeral, and we knew we were to see good dancing. One by one, the boys at the drums were replaced by men, and at intervals one or the other of the three players gave up his place to a newcomer who, by his manner of testing the tightness of the drumhead and the increasing minuteness of the adjustments he made

796 in the cords, was recognizable as a more able musician, a more experienced drummer.

Now the beat changed once more, and there were no more young dancers to be seen. They were dancing awasa, preparing for the spirits to come, so that during the long preparation the fury with which obia would burst upon them would be eased. In this awasa dance, the dancers patterned the massed movements after the solo and response of the song to which the dance was carried on.

Our paddler, Angita, acted as soloist against a chorus of [534] women. The seed rattles on his ankles clashed at the proper intervals of the music, adding a new sound to the combined notes of the drums and the monotonous pounding of the kwakwa. Forward he danced as he sang his solo, and the line of women opposite him retreated as he advanced. Then, as they sang the refrain, he danced backwards, as the women came closer toward him.

His rhythmic control surpassed any dancing we had seen on the river—never since have we seen a dancer who exhibited such perfect coordination of feet and muscles of the body as did Angita. This time there was no interruption, for he danced on until, voluntarily relinquishing his place, it was taken by another man, taller and more lean, who began a new awasa refrain, as he continued the dance. Occasionally a woman, brass on her wrists and at ankles, stepped from the line of women, and the dance became a wooing, the man advancing, the woman retreating, luring him on.

A new note sounded in the drums. In front of the hut where we were sitting, the drumming beat upon our ears with the persistence of the flaying tropical rain. This new note soon superseded the other. Obia was being called by the drummers—and obia came.

The light of the crescent moon threw into paler shadow the oil lamps in the clearing. Overhead, screening the starlit sky, branches hung from the trees of the big bush. Our cook came up with our sun helmets.

"What are these for?"

"OBIA COMES!"

"Put them on. See the moon? You will catch fresh colds 796 [891]
if you sit in the moonlight with your heads uncovered."

So with sun helmets on our heads we sat, and, as we 781
listened to the new rhythms of the drums, there came a 796
shriek from the river which brought us to our feet. Those 776
who were not dancing ran up the hill away from the drums.

"Obia! Obia comes! It is the Kromanti!" were the cries, 787
and our cook and our town man placed themselves in line
across the front of our hut, watching uneasily.

"They will destroy all you have if they get inside," they called to us, "we must try to keep them out."

Up from the river, along the path he had trodden but a while before, came a man whom we could not recognize in the disguise given him by the paint on his face. Half his face was white, half a deep red, and we later learned what we did not then know, that this was the face marking of the Djadja Kromanti and that this man was possessed by one of the two Kromanti spirits which carry danger to those who are present when the seizure comes. He advanced toward the drums, machete in hand, as though he were stalking his prey, his legs raised high at every step, trailing some enemy. At his mouth the foam was gathering, and
the words he uttered were in the Kromanti tongo, the sacred [198]
speech not understood by the uninitiated.

The songs changed in character, and the singers were men. The women who had not run away were dancing a quick accompaniment to the drum beats, adding their shrill voices to the singing and the intensity of the cries of the possessed man. When the possessed man reached the hut, he stopped in front of the drummers. As their rhythms poured out of the barrel-like drums, he answered stroke for stroke with shouted cries in his sacred secret language, raising his machete higher and higher, until, with a quick stroke, he slashed at two of the players who were seated side by side on a log. He missed them by what seemed a hair's breadth as his machete, whistling through the narrow space between their bodies, sank deep into the log on which they sat.

796 Other cries now came to us, and from the bush a second
776 possessed man burst into the clearing. He, too, had a
781 machete, and he made straight for our hut. But obia did
787 not prompt him to insist on entering, and he came close to us, gibbering in our faces, and then, stepping high as had the other, went his way to slash at our washbasins, sending one of them, that we treasure as a memory of that night's adventure, hurtling into the bush with a deep dent in its side.

From the river came renewed shouts, and some of the men dashed to the bank to jump into a canoe and paddle into the rapids, so that they might watch the possessed man who had leaped into the river to pit his strength against the fast water. On and on he swam upstream in the foaming water, as from the bank we watched his progress uneasily in the clear light of the moon. Finally obia left him, and the men in the boat seized his inert form and brought him back to shore.

796 When we returned to our hut, we found several others
787 possessed. Obia had claimed six or seven, some with faces painted half white, half red, as was that of the first man, others with faces whitened, while still others had white faces with black markings. These last had Tigri, and the white was for Opete. Those who danced for the buzzard had no machetes, but went about in a circle, moving with bodies bent forward from their waists and with arms thrown back in imitation of the bird from which their spirit took its name.

One man with the Tigri face-painting took away the apinti from the drummer and placing it in the center of the clearing leaned over it and began drumming faster rhythms. Now indeed obia itself was drumming.

796 Long before this, we had observed the amenities of the occasion. As hosts, our duty was to provide the ceremonial
273 rum with which the spirits needed to be regaled, and our cook, holding the bottle of rum for us, filled and refilled the small glass which we offered to men and women. Some did not drink at all but poured part of the rum on the

ground, rubbing the remainder over arms and upper body. 796
Some took a sip and, like the others, poured the rest as a 273
libation to the Earth Mother. Few drank more than a little, and only the men had as much as half of the small wine glass we were using.

The bassia of Gankwe came to us. "Do not be afraid. Obia has come strong, but we have prepared for it. The men will not hurt people."

Led by him, we passed from one dancer to the next, giving to this one a sip, to that one a taste. But there was one elderly man who would not drink.

"Not until I get obia," he said, "and obia does not come to me tonight."

Not all the possessed men were slashing about with 796
cutlasses. One man pulled up grass, eating part and throwing 787
the rest over his head. Another in the strength of his possession uprooted large clumps of brush, and one broke off a liana of some size and wrapped it about his body, and danced with it.

Songs, dancing men, dancing women, machetes flashing in the moonlight . . . and over all the beat of the drum. This was the dance of the Kromanti obia.

Now the man who had refused a drink came up. He was trembling.

"Obia comes!" he cried. "Give me rum!"

As he tossed off the drink, he dashed toward the possessed
men. In his hand was a rattle, the first we had seen at this [534]
dance. The rattle is sacred to the Kromanti, and possession can be brought on by shaking it even when there are no drums. As he danced, he supplemented the rhythm of the drums with his rattle, and his dancing surpassed in its fury that of all the others. Men kept out of his way as he dashed back and forth in his contortions, and he continued his gyrations as those with painted faces, whom obia was releasing, began to feel exhaustion.

The drums never stopped. As long as obia remained unsatisfied, they would need to play on and on. While the drummers beat the Kromanti rhythms, and the man with

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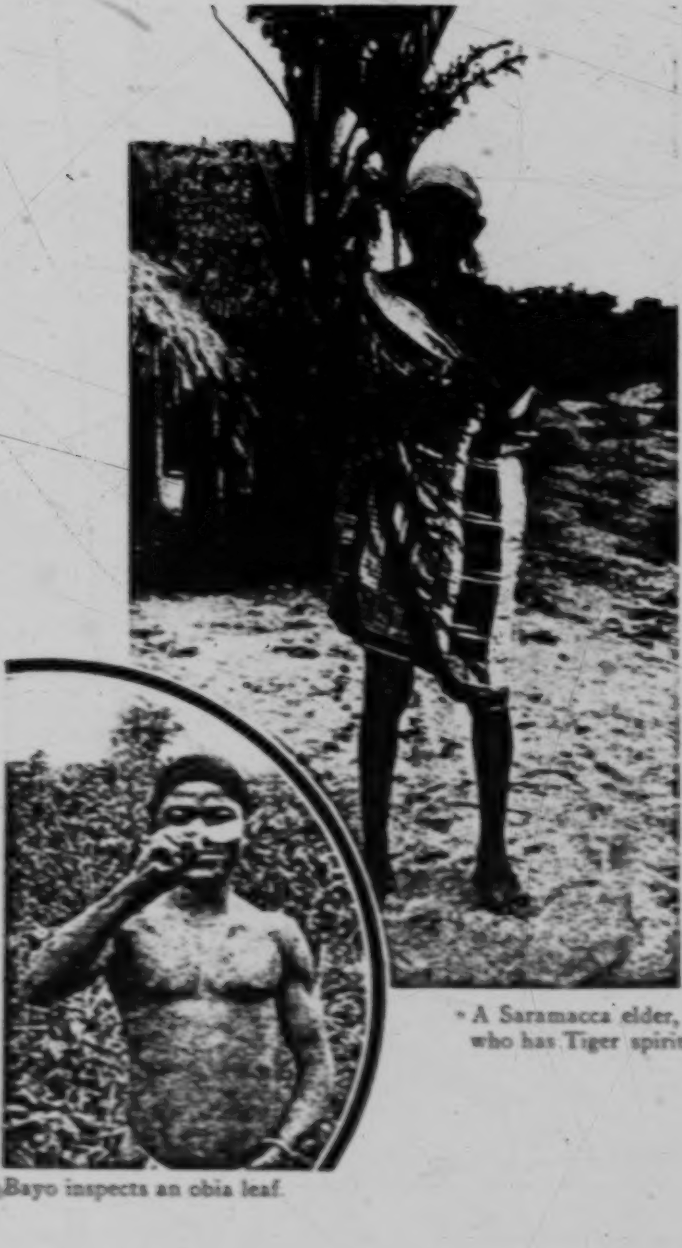

A Saramacca elder, who has Tiger spirit.

Bayo inspects an obia leaf.

[Facing P 332]

(Facing page 332)

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his rattle danced his dance, the moon sank behind the screen of branches.

It was late. Slowly the last dancer came out of his orgy of possession. One by one the drums stopped until, for a moment, all was quiet. Then, taking the apinti drum up the path beyond our clearing, one of the drummers drummed an invocation to the spirits that had come.

We trained our flashlights on the path which led to the river, lighting the way of the dancers to their waiting boats, while they sang for us the seketi song we had heard the night of Zimbi's funeral.

[533]
[539]

Thank you, thank you, white man,
For coming to the Saramacca River,
For bringing us your diamond fire,
To light the darkness of our path.

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At the village opposite our base camp, a girl had died shortly before our return from up river. The eighth night after the death was to be commemorated with the usual dancing of "eighth-day night," and with the ceremony of throwing away food for the spirit of the dead.

"Come tonight and we will dance for you," the men of the village said. It was agreed that they should come for us when they were through with the ceremony for throwing away the food, for the bereaved family would not look kindly upon the intrusion of the whites at the ceremony.

As we waited for the messenger, Bayo prowled about uneasily. He had been nervous for the past few days. His spirits had been troubling him, and he said he needed to dance. It was some time since he had danced, and his spirits were vexed with him for this neglect.

"If they dance Kromanti, I will dance, too," he said.

We talked with him of the rum we would have to take. The strength in which it was distilled made it necessary to cut it with water. Bayo watched us as we took out one bottle, prepared the rum, and then took up another. His hand interposed.

"Do not take too much rum," he said. "When there is much to drink, obia does not come." 764 796

The bottle ready, we waited. Eight, half-past, nine o'clock. When we had decided they were not coming for us, the sharp bark of Tross signaled the approach of a man up the path from the river bank. As he came into the circle of light, we recognized Apanto.

"Everything is ready, Bak'a," he said. "Come."

It was not an important village, this one across the river from our camp. It was smaller and had much less power than Gankwe, the seat of a clan head. But enough men had assembled for the ceremonies to make a dance, and the women were standing about waiting as we came from the river through the palm-frond guard. The moon was again up, but moving clouds hid it from view or covered it with a haze which dimmed its brilliance. A few houses fronted on the little clearing where the dance was to be held, and here and there some oil lanterns had been placed.

Not everything, we soon learned, was ready, for drums were lacking. They had an agida, but the two others which were needed were not there. Poor villages very often had to borrow their drums from other settlements. The dancers stood about waiting. [426]

We offered the tumao we had acquired, and Bayo returned to our camp for it. A large tin basin, turned upside down, gave the same metallic tenor voice as the apinti, and so with the makeshift orchestra the dancing began, two younger boys playing the kwakwa. 764 534

For a time it seemed as though we were only to see seketi. The children had had no opportunity at all to perform, and they stood about watching, while their elders danced the social dance we had seen so often. There was a tall man from a friendly village farther down the river whose dancing that night stood out. The careful awkwardness of his legs as he danced facing us, the carefully timed movements of arms and body showed us that in seketi, too, as the proverb ran, there were truly men on the lower river, as there were on the upper. 764 796

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A light rain fell, and for a while the dancing stopped. Deserting our benches, we joined the natives who clustered under the overhanging eaves of the houses, and sheltered ourselves from the shower. But the rain was soon over, and the moon came out again. The drummers took their places and the dancers resumed their seketi.

"Dance Kromanti," we urged, remembering Bayo, "we have seen much seketi."

"You will have to look out," said Apanto. "We have strong Kromanti here," as the drums began to call obia.

Bayo had been sitting behind us during the seketi. His face mirrored a frame of mind that was none too happy, for this was not the sort of dance that he had looked forward to. When Apanto gave the word to play Kromanti, however, Bayo rose, and when we next saw him, his head was low over the inverted tin basin which served for an apinti, and he was making the night throb with the intricacy of the messages he was sending to the strong spirits which were troubling him with their insistence for expression.

Where we sat, we could see the men becoming aware of the voices of the drums. Several rattles had made their appearance, and the sound they made as they were shaken in concert caused the men's bodies to grow rigid, while the women hovered uncertainly about. By now the evening's "play" was begun in earnest. No children remained to look on. At the moment, there was no dancing, for the men with the rattles, and those who were merely waiting for the spirit to come to them, moved about in the open place reserved for the dance, back and forth, waiting for their Kromanti spirits to enter their bodies. One man struck up a song, and the chorus carried the refrain, until interest in that song died down and another was sung.

These Kromanti songs were not of the lilting, rhythmic kind which other dances required. Some of them were slow and mournful, some quick and martial. Now they were singing to the Opete. The leader sang

"OBIA COMES!"

Opete kwasi Adjaini-o 764
Opete kwasi Adjaini-obia-o 533
Opete kwesi 539
Tide Adjaini-a weti kwao, kwao, kwao, kwao.

The chorus repeated,

Opete kwaso, Adjaini-o-yi
Opete kwaso, Adjaini-o-yo
Opete kwaso, Adjaini-o-kumani!

They were becoming more and more agitated. The rattles sounded a faster tempo, the drums beat louder, and the music swung into another song.

Amanu Djadja-o
O-o-o-o-o-o
Amanu Djadja-o
O ye-e-e
Kuma, luku, mowa,
O-e Mama-e
O-o-o-o-o - o - o . . .

This was a song of greeting for the Djadja spirit. Bayo 764 still urged the rhythms out of the improvised apinti which 533 he was playing. The drummers were calling all the Kromanti spirits, the buzzard called Opete, the jaguar, Tigri, and Djadja, the "devil." Would they come?

The question was answered soon enough. Out of the 787 forest into the clearing ran one whose obia had come to him. It was Opete obia and, in his strength of possession, he had torn off two branches from a palm tree in the bush. These he held under his arms, so that, as he pranced about in his dance, he impersonated the awkwardness of the great carrion bird which gave its name to his obia. The tufts of palm leaves projecting from behind his flexed arms were wings. He leaped as in flight, then with startling rapidity he began turning round and round to the flapping of his wings.

Apanto suddenly seized a stick we held and, whirling it 787 about our heads, was off to his dance, joining the six or 796

787 seven men who were dancing the individual dances of their
796 spirits. His dancing was unlike any we had seen on the river. There was a stealthy, effeminate grace in his movements, which produced a strange effect on the visitors. Suddenly it struck us—Apanto was one of those who had the dreaded Tigri! When he fought, he fought with his finger nails, not his fists, and when he danced, he danced with the feline grace of the tiger trailing his prey.

Suddenly the drums faltered. People near us cried out. Voices were heard.

"Bayo!"

"Bayo has gone into the bush!"

"Sound the drums to bring him back!"

In the silence of the moment, we could hear from the
787 direction of the river the cries of our friend, now in the grip of obia. "*Hoi, hoi, hoi! Obia! Hoi!*"

The lull in the drumming was only momentary, for instantly another man jumped for the makeshift drum, which Bayo had left, and the voice of the spirits once more rolled out. Ten, twelve men were whirling before us in their dance, and now more joined them, until it was impossible to remain seated, and we rose, and stood on guard.

More cries. These came from the village. Someone else had got obia.

A woman dashed up to us. "Run, white people, run! Come inside my house! Obia has come too soon! Obia is bad tonight! You will be hurt!"

As we shook our heads, she hurried to a near-by house, and we could hear the slam of the door and the sound of the wooden bolt as it was shot to. She had done what she could for the visitors. If they would stay, let them take the consequences.

Before us a creeping figure appeared, with eyes fixed upon us, his muscles tense, as if ready for a spring. The dancing men who were not yet possessed, closed in front of us. They held him as he crouched there, glaring. Those who restrained him called to the others.

"See to the guns!"

"OBIA COMES!"

"Hide the bush knives!"

These Kromanti men, in the strength of their obia, try to seize weapons made of iron, and if they succeed in wresting from a man a machete or gun, nothing is safe. Apanto, the obia man, and the old men of the village, had no wish for tragedy.

"Sound the drums louder, faster!" came the cry. "Call Bayo from the bush!"

The drummers redoubled their efforts, until at last Bayo's spirit responded to their call.

"Look out! Take care!" called the women who had stayed outside their huts, as they ran before us up the path, away from the two men whose obia was so dangerous. "It is Bayo! Obia came!"

It was indeed Bayo, but not a recognizable Bayo. He was on all fours. His knees and shins dragged over the stony path on which he crawled so that we dared not think of the lacerations we would see the following day. He stared about him wildly. Saliva drooled from his mouth, and his tongue lolled from between his parted lips. Two of the older men had him in charge, and several of those who had been dancing now came to his side to restrain him should he attempt to leap.

"Stop the drums!" came the command, and in a few moments the stillness of the night was restored to us. For with the drums quieted, Bayo and the other whom obia had possessed could be treated by the older men who knew the way of obia, knew how to give them release from the spirit without doing harm to the village and its people.

On Bayo dragged himself, out of sight, and the other man was taken with him. Soon they called to us to come and see Bayo. He was being brought out of his seizure.

He was still on his hands and knees, and the saliva still dropped from his mouth. As we looked, an elder stooped over him and whispered some words in his ear. Taking the small wineglass we had brought for our present of rum for the dance, he poured a few drops of liquor in his eyes, then in his ears, and then brought the glass to his mouth.

787 Bayo's teeth closed with a snap, and the glass came away in the hands of the elder who had held it. A piece of glass remained in Bayo's mouth. Slowly, as we looked on, his mouth began to work. Would he swallow the piece of glass whole? Would he chew it into bits and then swallow it? We had heard of those whom Kromanti possessed who did this, but would Bayo?

He did not swallow it. Slowly the muscles of the mouth moved, and slowly the piece of glass appeared between his lips, then, slowly ejected, it fell to the ground.

The old man tried again to make him drink, this time giving him the liquor in a metal cup. When the cup was released, the marks of the boy's teeth were deeply imprinted on it.

In the clearing where the dancing had taken place, men and women stood about in little groups, excitedly talking. Obia had come without the proper preparation. Obia had come too soon—it had come too strong. Lucky for them that visiting obia men who knew how to control this strength were present, people who knew how to take violent men in the full strength of their violence and bring them to sanity by speaking magic words which obia listened to.

"Ah, Bak'a, it is good they were here. Obia came too strong. If the drums had not stopped, many would have been hurt, and our village would have mourned. When obia comes too soon, it is bad."

6

We were in our canoe, returning to the base camp. Two of the men who lived in the village where the dance had been held were paddling, and in the stern sat Bayo, a strange, strained, silent Bayo.

He had regained consciousness, for when we had asked him, "Are you ready to come back with us?" he had answered a hoarsely whispered "Ai." In the boat with us was the tumao drum, and as the two of us and Bayo sat silent, the paddlers gossiped about the events of the evening.

"OBIA COMES!"

Back at the camp, Bayo was exhausted. Tross, after his frantic welcome, had settled down and was lying near his master who sat on a box, leaning against one of the posts of the hut. We were alone with him and our servants. The Bush Negroes had left us at the shore. Bayo had strong obia, and his obia had obviously not been satisfied. Would the spirits seize him once more?

Wisdom dictated that we take ordinary precautions and, as Bayo sat there, we accounted for all the machetes and Bayo's shotgun and locked them in a canister.

Did he want water? No. Suddenly he roused himself, and we came to our feet. What was to happen now?

He strode over to the corner of the hut where the tumao drum stood, and, hoisting it on his shoulder, walked out of the hut. As we followed him, we could see him stop at the river bank and place the drum on the ground. He brought his hands down on the drumhead. A rhythm sounded. Was he signaling the village across the river that he had arrived safely? Was he speaking to the spirits that had just left him? The drumming left off as suddenly as it had started, and he came back and replaced the drum.

But he was not yet ready to go into his hammock and rest, and he stood against the doorway, his tired body gleaming in the light of the lanterns, his knees slightly flexed, arms spread wide over the side poles of the house, his hands grasping the wood.

"Will you go to your hammock, Bayo?"

"Ai," and our town man who had helped him there came back saying that he was already asleep.

"It is all over," we hazarded the opinion.

But our cook was of another mind.

"Massa," he said, "you can never tell when the spirit will come back. Do not sleep without the lantern. Let it stay lighted."

And so we slept with lighted lantern, while Bayo lay separated from us by a partition which did not reach above a man's head.

7

787 The next day was our last among the Saramacca people. Bayo came to us early to help with the packing. He was apparently none the worse for his seizure and, as he worked, we could tell from his manner how release had come to him and how the tension we had noticed the past few days had left him.

On his body were no marks. His mouth showed no cuts where the glass was bitten off and chewed. When we told him about the glass, he knew nothing of it. Had he not known about this eating of glass, he might well have doubted our word, for when we examined his lips and palate and tongue, not even a scratch showed.

"What did you drum last night, Bayo?"

"When, before the obia came to me?"

He remembered nothing after he had leaped from the improvised apinti to run into the bush.

"Not when you drummed apinti, but when you came back here and took the tumao to the river."

"I don't remember. Did I do that?"

8

609 789 Despite the early hour we had to leave in order to catch the weekly train for the coast, the boats of our friends began to be seen off the landing place as they came to say their farewells. The good woman Tita, whom they called [316] [416] Mother Snake behind her back, was the first to arrive. She walked slowly up from the river bank, pipe in mouth, a pot on her head, and one in each hand. The pots held obias which, she said, were made especially for us, to give us great powers in our own land—one to keep us safe from the ghosts of those we had wronged; one to guard us against the acts of the unfriendly living; one to make all those from whom we sought advantage "love" us.

123 [154] Sedefo's younger wife came with her child on her back to collect whatever tin cans were about, and some gift for the child when it wakened, knowing that something was

always given to children in the white man's camp. With 123
her, too, came Sedefo's eldest son, the one who had already danced Kromanti.

"White man," he said in a soft confidential voice that was like his father's, "you gave the Granman gifts. Lower river chiefs are big men, too." This was a prelude to the suggestion that the Gankwe chief would not take it amiss if we sent him a pith helmet.

From the village where we had seen Bayo possessed the night before, Tenye and her two brothers, Yamati and Sabape, came to say goodbye, and with them was their "father" Semiye, Abane's brother. He was to have been "captain" of our dugout, but several days before he had told us he would be unable to go with us to the railhead. As haltingly he gave us his reasons, we wished that white men's lives were not keyed to railroad and boat and university schedules—wished, too, that it were possible to give a happier turn to the drama which bush destiny seemed ready to stage for Semiye.

Semiye was as slender and graceful as Abane, that 159
superb dancer whom Yamati and Sabape, sons by different wives, wished so much to emulate. The passion which Abane had for dancing, Semiye knew to flare up within himself when he was at work. No man on the lower river could send a heavily loaded boat up the rapids faster than Semiye, and when he went fishing or lumbering, the catch he brought back was large, his timber rafts were valuable. He had not always felt this drive for work. When he and his village friend Abai were boys together, Abai had been the one to suggest games, to make decisions, to show courage in leading girls down side paths into the bush. When the time came for Semiye to go through the Kromanti initiation, he could not do the feats which Abai did so easily and with such bravado. Later, when the courage of a man was his, he was ashamed to ask for permission to go through the initiatory rites that were intended to test boys, and so Semiye was one of the few men on the river who was not a Kromanti man.

159 In spite of all this, Semiye prospered. He married first one wife and then a second, and his five children were healthy and bright. But Abai, poor fellow, had had a hard time. His wife was a scold. His small son was straight-limbed and alert, but his girl child was ailing, and three of his children had died before they could walk. These days, when a load was to be carried for some white man to the city, Semiye was the one most often hired, and, because of their friendship, he saw to it that Abai went, too. Abai, who as a youth had led in all their escapades, grew more and more silent, but when the Tiger spirit possessed him, it made him noisy and violent and caused him to run about in search of Semiye with the threat to kill him. In the village they said Abai's spirit was growing ugly; they said that Abai's Tiger spirit hated Semiye. The night before, we ourselves had heard Abai when possessed by his Tiger spirit again threaten Semiye.

For the first time in many years Semiye began to know the old fears, and because this time he had to contend with a powerful spirit, he went to Apanto, the obia man, who gave him a strong obia. Then . . . then he decided it might be best to share work with Apanto occasionally.

"And now," he said, "you know why I can't go with you. I can't go without Apanto, and you promised Bayo he would have the front paddle."

After the dance of the night before, having witnessed Bayo's Tiger spirit in action, it was all very understandable.

Thus it came about that our last hour on the river was spent like so many other hours, with our boat in the competent hands of Bayo. But this time we were not to see him at the prow of the boat, for when we had told him that Semiye could not captain it, he had exclaimed, "Ai-yo! Then I will be your captain, and the son of Sakefo will take the front paddle." So now, with farewells said and canoe loaded, the boat backed away from the familiar landing place, turned, and was off down river, Bayo at the post of command—an honor he would not soon allow his friends to forget.

"OBIA COMES!"

The river had fallen. Whole stretches appeared as dry as 484
the sandy village clearings. The green-heart trees were in [137]
full bloom, looking like giant flowering mimosas with heads lifted high above the green wall of matted bush. As we sped past the village landing of Gankwe, women washing their clothes and children at play called out a last "*Adiosio-o-o-o*," but in a moment we rounded a bend of the river and were out of sight.

Our only stop was at New Village, not far from the railroad, where the chief had promised to have an apinti for us. He was expecting us, and with him was his friend, the chief of Kadyu, whose village lay below the railhead.

"I had trouble finding a skin for the head," he said, "but 431
one of my men shot a deer, and so I have a fine one for 789
you. . . . And here is an obia to keep you alive on the water." He transferred the power of the obia to us, and then, as we rose to leave, he added, "When you get to your home, tell the headman of your village 'Howdo' in the name of the Chief of New Village, and his friend, the Chief of Kadyu."

9

As we floated up to the landing place where men were 137
waiting to take our boxes to the train, we saw an hibiscus 177
tree in bloom before the little shop kept by a British Guiana mulatto who did some trading with the Bush Negroes.

"What do you call this tree, Bayo?"

"Which one, this with the red flowers? I don't know. That's a Bak'a sani—a white man's thing."

Bakra sani!

The hibiscus tree, the mulatto who for the Bush Negro is also a Bakra, ourselves and our phonograph and flashlights—all were white men's things, intruders in his bush, strangers. Only by the grace of his powerful ancestors, and of the gods of his ancestors, might such things be allowed life and a measure of joy there, as witness the bright blossoms, the livelihood the mulatto earned, and our own good health.

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THE language of the Saramacca Bush Negroes is called 197 by them the *Saramacca tongo*—the Saramacca tongue. 199 Though there are many African words in ritual and everyday speech, the Saramacca tongo is essentially Negro-Portuguese, with a sprinkling of English and Dutch words. In the city of Paramaribo the Negroes speak *taki-taki*, Negro-English, though Dutch and Portuguese words are also found. The structure of the language of both bush and coastal Negroes is essentially African, that is to say, in all the borrowings it was the word which was borrowed, while the African idiom was retained, so that it may be said that the Negroes speak African dialects translated into English or Portuguese or Dutch. Simple examples of this are such phrases as "carry come" for "bring"; "carry go" for "take away"; or "hunger kills me" for "I am hungry"; or "one time" for "immediately."

For the correspondences between the languages of the 122 Suriname Negroes and of West Africa, we have relied on various dictionaries and grammars of West African languages, and on our own findings made during our field work on the West African coast. In writing the words of Suriname 128 and West African languages in both the glossary and the body of this book, the vowels have the "continental" values, not those given in English. It is to be noted that diacritical marks which would be necessary to indicate the [194] strong nasalization that characterizes Bush Negro speech have been omitted from both text and glossary, in order to simplify the writing of native terms. Finally, we must

[p. 344 is blank]

128 [193] Finally, we must explain that in rendering the plural of native words, we have not employed the terminal "-*s*" that makes the plural in English, for in this regard we have followed the usage of Saramacca tongo.

A

a, he, she.

104 *Abina*, an important female ancestor. The name may be a modification of *Abena*, a woman's Tuesday name (see under *Afi*). In one village on the Saramacca, a dance known only there, called the *binia*, is said to have been taught by a female ancestor during the "running away time." This fact may have bearing on its origin, as it may point to an ancestor who had come from the Benin (Nigerian) kingdom. The people of Benin are known as the *Bini*.

aboma, boa constrictor.

adiosi, goodbye. From the Portuguese.

adji-boto, a game of counters. This is played in Suriname as it is in the Caribbean, and in Africa. *Adji* is a Dahomean word. In Paramaribo, among the Awka Bush Negroes, and in the Caribbean, the Ashanti name for the game, *wari*, is employed.

Afi, "day name" for a girl born on Friday. The corresponding Friday name for a boy is *Kofi*. These day names are found in bush and town in Suriname. They are met with in Jamaica and names like *Kofi* (Cuffy), *Kwaku* (Quacoo), *Kwasi* (Quashi), are known in the United States. These day names exist among the peoples of the Gold Coast of West Africa, where they are definitely associated with the soul, in the same manner as they are in Suriname.

Affica, Africa. This is the Saramacca pronunciation of the word. While known on the river, it is less used than the expression *neng'e konde*, literally, "Negro kingdom." The word *konde* is used interchangeably for kingdom and village. The word *to*, for example, in Dahomey, is used in the same way.

Afrekete, a Saramacca goddess, whose origin is Dahomean. In Dahomey her genealogy differs from the one given in Suriname. Dahomeans say she is the daughter of *Agbe* and *Naete*, gods of the sea.

agida, the great drum of the Saramacca trio of drum types. In Paramaribo, when the earth spirits are called, a spirit named *Agida* is invoked as one of the earth pantheon.

ago, ancestors. It is said in Dahomey that among the ancient inhabitants this Saramacca meaning was known.

agose, name given a child born feet foremost. The same name is given such children in Dahomey and in Haiti.

Akantamasu, the god of the ant hill. A Gold Coast name.

akra, see *kra*.

ambe, an exclamation said to be a contraction of the phrase "by my mother's womb."

Awasi, name of Dahomean derivation.

Anansi, spider. *Anansi* is the trickster in the cycle of stories which bear his name. The *Anansi* stories on the Gold Coast and in the New World are like the Br'er Rabbit stories in the United States. In the New World, aside from

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Dutch Guiana, *Anansi* appears as the dominant trickster in Negro tales in Jamaica, and even in the stories of this country we occasionally hear of Miss Nancy.

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ando, an exclamation. *Ando* is thought to be a famous ancestor. One of the strong warrior *obias* on the river is called the "hunter *ando*."

apinti, name of the Bush Negro tenor drum. The same name for this drum is found in western Nigeria and Dahomey; among the Gold Coast peoples the term is mpintin.

Apuku, gods of the bush, who are visualized as little people. Whenever natural clearings appear in the jungle they are said to have been made by these *Apuku* gods. In southern Nigeria and Dahomey children who die young are called *Abiku*. They are said to be the messengers of the great gods who send them to earth and recall them. In Jamaica there is a cult whose members are called *Pukumerians*, but not enough is known of Jamaican worship to be able to determine whether this cult is exactly comparable to the *Apuku* cult in Suriname.

Asase, the Earth Mother. The earth deity has the identical name among the Ashanti.

awa, affirmative exclamation.

awasa, Saramacca dance. In Ashanti this dance is known under the name *awisa*.

Awka, name for another tribe of Suriname Negroes. In southern Nigeria there is a group of Ibo-speaking people known as the *Awka* people, and a village not far from Ife called Awka.

aya, yes.

azang, a "spiritual barrier" of palm fronds erected across a path in order to brush away evil that might be seeking to enter the village. The word is Dahomean. The *azang* is today only infrequently seen in the larger Dahomean centers, but when an epidemic comes, whether it is measles or influenza or whooping cough or the dreaded smallpox, these are put in place.

azake ayeaye, firefly; the Dahomean word is *azofe ayeaye*.

B

bak'a, bakra, bakara, white man. This is the same as the "buckra" of the Carolina Negroes.

bak'a muye, white woman. See also *muye*.

bak'a sani, literally "white man's thing." Idiomatically, anything which is outside the civilization of the Saramacca people. Thus an hibiscus tree on the lower river was called a "white man's thing." This term was also applied to our flashlight before it had been christened "diamond fire"; to our phonograph; to our ideas; to our medicine. We have heard the same distinction made in West Africa between the white man's things and those that appertained to the blacks.

bandamba, dance for twins and marriage. It is known and danced in Africa on the Gold Coast.

banya, a dance. It is found in both bush and town, and the *bakafutu banya* (cross-legged banya) is associated with dancing for the ancestors. The dance is known on the Gold Coast.

bassia, the second in command to a chief. In the town this word is used to name an overseer. The word is also employed in Jamaica.

104 *baya*, to dance. From the Portuguese. See also *bobi*.

b'oko dei, daybreak.

bonkoro, the Paramaribo word for albino. The Saramacca people say "Toad person."

boto, boat.

boyo, in the song we quote, this word refers to the Earth spirits. When the Ashanti call on *Asase Ya*, the Earth Mother, they also speak of the creature of the underworld as *Asase Bowa*.

bangule, half of a broken canoe on which a corpse lies until the coffin is completed.

C

chaka, literally, shake. The meaning is extended to designate the type of dancing which accentuates the shaking of the buttocks.

D

dede, dead, death.

Dosu, name given a child born next after twins. This same name is given such a child in Dahomey and Haiti.

Djuka, a member of the Awka tribe of Negroes. In the city of Paramaribo and elsewhere in the coastal region this word is used loosely to refer to all Bush Negroes, whatever their tribal affiliations. No exhaustive study has been made of the Awka tribe, but what material there is suggests a predominating African culture from Southern Nigeria.

Dyombi, name of a god. In Suriname this deity, who is associated with the silk-cotton tree, is thought of as the child of *Gedeonsu* and *Tinné* (*q.v.*), and is dreaded by the natives. He is said in Dahomey, where he is also worshipped, to dance with the thunder pantheon. In Dahomean folklore the *Dyombi* are associated with hunters who conquered the mythical thirty-horned giants. The name is well known to New World Negroes and has come to be associated with ghosts. It occurs in the Caribbean interchangeably with *zombi* and *duppy*.

F

fo-fo, as explained in the text. It is an old Dahomean term meaning "anger." The word has also been reported as being in use by the Bantu-speaking peoples of Loango as a name for a medicinal herb.

G

g'a, literally "great." It has been assumed that this word is derived from the Portuguese "gran," but the derivation is probably a dual one, since the Ewe (Togoland) word *ga* signifies "great, old," and in Dahomey *ga* means "chief, elder, head of an organization."

g'aman, chief, headman. It is also the Saramacca term for the Dutch Governor of the Colony.

g'a sembe, "big" person, *i.e.*, important person. See *sembe*.

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g'a tangi, literally "great thanks," but idiomatically "please," or "I beg you." See *tangi*. 109

G'a Zombi, ghost. See *Dyombi*.

G'a Yorka, ghost. See *Yorka*.

gbalo, expression of affirmation. Used as interpolation in narrative, and in council meetings.

Gedevoru, name of a god who lives in the silk-cotton tree. In Dahomey the word is a "strong name" for the same tree. The ancient people on the plateau of Abomey, the present capital of Dahomey, were the *Gedevi*, and there is a legend in Dahomey which says that there were once two brothers, one *Gede*, one *Hovoru*. They quarreled and one turned into a stone and became the god animating the great *Gede* rock in Dahomey. The other entered the silk-cotton tree. When our informants in Dahomey heard that in Suriname they worshipped *Gedevoru*, they exclaimed, "You not only have Dahomeans there, you have people from right here in Abomey."

gronmi, a citizen. Literally "child of the earth," *i.e.*, a person who belongs to the village where he is living. *Mi* is the Yoruban word for "child."

gosri, doll. This word has the same meaning in Dahomey.

H

ha'i, *hali*, haul.

hebi, heavy. Also used in the sense of "hard," as in *a baya hebi*, "he danced hard."

Hene Tonegbwe, said to be a "strong name" for the deity called the "Mother of the River." *Hene* is Ashanti for chief. Whether *Tonegbwe* refers to the sacred lake Nohwe, in Dahomey, or not, is difficult to say.

hohobi, twins. The word is from Dahomey, the modern Dahomean pronunciation being *hohovi*.

I

Ingi, Indian.

K

kambosa, "the other wife of my husband." In its larger meaning, it signifies "the woman who makes trouble for me."

kamemba, cicatrizations made on the faces and bodies of men and women.

kandu, a "spiritual lock" found over doorways, on fruit-bearing trees, and in fields to keep off thieves by means of its magic power. It is of Bantu origin.

kankant'i, cotton tree. An old Dahomean word for this tree is *gongonti*. See *t'i*.

Kediamo, the Sky God. This is one of his "strong names." He is also known as *Nyankompon* and *Kediampon*. These names are employed today in the Gold Coast for the same deity, the latter pronounced there *Twediampon*.

Kronina dagowe, the name of one of the snake deities. *Dagowe* is Suriname for the Dahomean and Haitian *Dangbe*. The snake *Dangbe* is considered the founder of one of the Dahomean families.

kere-kere, expression of affirmation used to interpolate in council meetings and when listening to a long narrative. Also pronounced *kede*, and *keide*. These interpolations punctuate all pauses in speech, and the rhythm and inflection

104 is analogous to the interpolations, "Oh, Lord," "Glory," "Yes, Lord," "Hallelujah," and "Too true," used in Negro churches in this country. These interpolations occur in speech and ceremonies in West Africa, particularly on the Gold Coast.

kerki, church. From the Dutch.

Kesebia, a snake deity. In Togoland this god is known as the wife of one of the sky gods.

keskesi, monkey.

kodjo, cudgel.

koio, expression of affirmation. It is employed as an interpolation in narrative, and in proceedings at council meetings.

komfo, a person possessed by the spirit of an African diviner. In this sense the word is used in both bush and town. It is of Ashanti-Fanti origin.

koti-go, cut across.

'kra, soul. This word is that of the Gold Coast, a contraction of *okra*. Saramacca people also drop the "*r*" and say *ok'a*.

104 915 769 *Kromanti*, the name of a category of amulets which help the fighter, and also, we have strong reason to believe, of a male secret society. The former is known as *Kromanti obia*. The word can be most easily traced to the small kingdom of Coromantyne on the Gold Coast of Africa and to the slave factories in the coastal cities of Little and Great Coromantyne. The origin is often traced also to the Ashanti oath of this name, commemorating a battle in which the Ashanti King Osai Tutu was killed. Everywhere in the New World the Coromantyne Negroes were known as intractable, and it is claimed that they were the instigators of most of the slave rebellions in the New World, especially Jamaica and in the United States. In the Saramacca bush the rôle of the *Kromanti* group is in all respects akin to that of the Asafotche companies on the Gold Coast today. In both instances they are companies of young men—in more ancient times, warriors. In both instances they have magic to help them in war. In both instances this magic includes powers which endow the members with resistance to bullets, and to all things that cut or lacerate, like knives and thorns and glass. In both instances the power comes from the enshrining of magic, in Suriname called *obia*, and on the Gold Coast called *suman*. In some of the old Asafotche songs sung on the Gold Coast the word *Kromanti* appears. The opening of all Asafotche songs with "fire, fire," a euphemism for calling the alarm to indicate the need for all members to gather, is heard in the *Kromanti* songs. The role of the young men of punishing for trespassing against clan or village property, and of watching over the chief's rule, exists in the Saramacca country as it exists on the Gold Coast.

krutu, council, counsel. The Saramacca pronunciation is *k'utu; krutu wosu*, council house.

104 *kuma*, a formal greeting. It is used especially in the Granman's village. The entire interchange when two people of the Saramacca tribe meet follows the West African pattern.

kunu, a supernatural force controlled by the ancestors and gods, which punishes with extinction the families of those who violate the laws of the ancestors. It would seem to be derived from the Ewe (Togoland) word *kunu*, "death."

kwati-kwati, no, no. A ceremonial interpolation used in council.

kye, exclamation of surprise and entreaty. Sometimes pronounced *ke* and sometimes *tye*. This phonetic shift occurs in Negro speech everywhere in the New

World, as, for example, the Southern "cyah" and "cyarriage" for "car" and "carriage" or "gyahden" for "garden." 104

L

Lomé, name of a Bush Negro village. Probably derived from the city of Lome in Togoland.

lanti, government.

liba, moon. The term is also extended to mean "crescential," as in *liba-bangi*, a crescential stool. See also under *mira*. In taki-taki *liba* means river. Saramacca for river is *liba*, from the Portuguese.

lo, clan. *Hlo* is the Ewe (Togoland) equivalent.

loko, a sacred tree. It is called by the identical term in Dahomey and Togoland, where it is also held in reverence. The Yoruba, who have the same attitude toward it, call it *iroko*.

M

Mamadam, the great falls of the Saramacca. There the "Mother of the River" is said to live. It is difficult to determine the exact African parallel for this. An important sacred lake in Dahomey is called *Nohwe*—"house of our mother." The word *dam* in Ashanti means "room" and *mama* has our own connotation. In Ashanti a tributary of the sacred *Tano river* is called *Aberewa* meaning "old woman."

man, pronounced West Indian Negro fashion, "mahn." The meaning is the same as in English.

massa, master. This word is pronounced in the Suriname bush as it is in the South and in the English-speaking colonies in Africa and has the same meaning. The pronunciation of the Coastal Negroes is *masra*.

matapi, cassava press. The word comes from the indigenous Indians.

mbe, "extended family," descendants through the mother's line not too distantly related.

muye, woman. The derivation is the Portuguese *mulher*.

N

nana, grandfathers, ancestors. The word is Ashanti.

neku, a poisonous vine used to kill the fish in the creeks.

neng'e (*nengere*), this word means "Negro" in Suriname; the first pronunciation given is that of the bush and the second of the coastal region. In the Saramacca country the word *neng'e* is used interchangeably with the word *lo*, meaning clan, and has the further meaning of people. Thus, a man would be spoken of as belonging either to the *Popoto Lo* or being a *Popoto Neng'e*. It has been claimed that this word is a Negro modification of the Portuguese word signifying "black." However, in Dahomey one of the gods of the earth pantheon is called *Suvi Nenge* and he is visualized as being the black vulture. In recent times, though, the Dahomeans have learned to be ashamed of the word *nenge*, which they have come to identify with the French *negre*, for it is said that Dahomeans who have gone to France as soldiers have come to know it as a term of derision. Hence they prefer the French *noir*. In Dahomey the forgers speak of a small piece of black iron as *nenge*, and once when our

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took was taken unaware, and wished to express his surprise at the excellence of a game board which was modeled in such a way that the base of the board was held up by six small human figures, his exclamation was "Grage neng'e!" This is a term of affection for a small child, a term which had apparently fallen into bad repute in recent times because of those who had come to know the European association. These examples would seem to indicate African as well as European sources for the word "Negro." See also *opete*, *yank'e*.

neng'e *bonde*, Africa. *Cf. Af'ica.*

neng'e *Nana*, African ancestors.

man *neng'e*, literally, "male Negro," but idiomatic for an adult man who has power in his community, a man who has proved himself as a full-fledged member of his group. It is a term of pride. *Cf.* man.

Nyankompon, name used by the Saramacca people for the Sky God. This is the Gold Coast name of the same deity.

O

obia, a supernatural force which comes from the great gods and was given to man to protect and heal him. *Obia* is also the term used for the charms which derive their power from this force. In the British West Indies the term is spelled *obeah* and is understood by whites to denote black magic.

obia *cuts*. The healing magic inherent in *obia* may be given a man either by letting medicine enter his body through cuts made, or by putting this medicine inside red or blue or white cotton or inside a cowrie shell or a piece of wood or string which he wears as a charm.

obia man, a man who practices *obia*. Such a man would be a maker of charms, and would have the knowledge to control and invoke the personal force to make effective whatever object he wished to endow with magic powers.

odi, Saramacca greeting. This may be related to the Southern Negro "howdy."

ogi, evil. It must be noted that the word in many instances as used by Negro peoples in Africa and the New World has not the connotation that the word "evil" has in our language. The expression "*ogi t'yepi*" means "evil itself," and is often used affectionately to designate someone who has outwitted another. The Negroes who speak French in Africa use the word *malin* in the same sense, and the English-speaking Africans use the words "too bad" or "bad too much." This use of "too bad" has persisted in American Negro speech.

okai, go, turn.

okai no mo, keep on going, turning.

opete, vulture, buzzard. An Ashanti word. See also *neng'e*, *yank'e*.

opo, amulet which gives the owner power over the will of another.

Oyo, a word used by an important captain on the river to impress us with his rank. *Oyo* is the name for one of the Yoruban stocks. A legend in Dahomey credits the *Oyo*, their traditional enemies, with being the first rulers of the earth.

P

pangi, woman's cloth. This is usually a strip about a yard wide and a yard and a half long, worn so that it reaches from the waist to the knee and encircles the lower part of the body. The word is derived from the French *pagne*.

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pemba, white clay. This word is Bantu, coming from the region of the lower Congo.
pina bara, hairdressing style.
pinda, peanut. This is also a Bantu word.

S

safri, softly; idiomatic for handling a situation delicately.
seketi, a social dance. It is known in Ashanti but is today seldom danced there. We collected a song in the Ashanti country with the same words as that of a *seketi* song sung by the Bush Negroes.
sembe, person. This is the Saramacca word; the coastal Negroes use *soma*.
Sofia Bada, name of a god. In Dahomey this would mean Thunder King *Bada*, and there *Bade* is the youngest son of the thunder pantheon and the most cruel one.
sula, rapids. *Su* in Ashanti is water.
soma, person. An Ashanti word. *Cf. sembe*.
susa, a boy's dance. It is often danced to thank the earth gods for good harvests.

T

tangi, thanks. Also used in the form "*Tangi, tangi*" for "I beg you."
tapu, preventive against evil magic.
tata, father.
tchina, taboo. This is a Bantu word used in Loango. In Paramaribo the word for taboo is *trefa*, borrowed from the Jewish slave-owners who came from Brazil.
te, until. This word is employed in bush and town for "till," but in idiomatic use intensifies the word it modifies. The expression *so te* is heard in story-telling in Suriname as well as in English-speaking countries in Africa.
temba, wood carving. Probably from the English "timber."
ti'i, tree. An example of double derivation, coming from the English "tree" and the Ewe-Dahomean word *ati*, which has the same meaning. See also *kankanti'i*, *Gedeonsu*.
tia, aunt. Used as a term of respect for any older woman. From the Portuguese.
tio, uncle. Used as a term of respect for any older man. From the Portuguese.
Tinsi, a spirit which lives in the silk-cotton tree, and is the wife of *Gedeonsu* (*q.v.*). In Dahomey *Tinsi* is danced to in the pantheon of *Agadahonu*, a god who personalizes the totemic origin of one of the Dahomean families.
Tone, generic name for the river gods. Probably a Mahi (Dahomean) term. The river cult is one of the strongest cults in both Suriname town and bush. In Dahomey there is a legend that when the first kings of the last royal family conquered the plateau of Abomey, the priests of the river cult fomented rebellions against the new rulers, and were all sold into slavery. Nothing of their cult is said to be known today in Dahomey, and the old gods they worshipped are left to trouble the Dahomeans. Today there are places in Dahomey where no Dahomean dares to go. Sometimes, it is said, they hear drums beating from the river bottom, and sacrifices are given to the rivers, although the proper invocations to appease the gods are no longer known.
Tonagbwe, river goddess.
Tonoro, a snake god, also called "Papa God." Cowrie shells, which up to comparatively recent times were the currency of West Africa, are referred to

104 as *papa moni* (money) on the Saramacca River. West African folklore gives accounts of snake river gods in whose bodies are imbedded cowries.

tefu, food taboo. See *tchina*.

trutru, indeed; true.

trutru Saramacca, Bush Negro name for all the land above the Mamadam falls. The Saramacca Negro speaks the phrase with great pride. Whether this is associated with the achievement of the early ancestors in penetrating the bush, or is to be traceable to African distinctions of rank, it is impossible to say. Among the Awka tribe on the Marowyne River the upper river tribes consider themselves more aristocratic than those who live on the lower river.

tuman, a "long" drum, the medium-sized drum of the Saramacca trio of drum types. It is played especially for the *Apuku* gods.

V

vodu, name of a particular kind of snake; a term used for all sacred snakes. In Paramaribo it is known also in its fuller meaning as a generic term for all the gods, which is the sense in which it is employed in Haiti (*vodun*) and in Dahomey. In Paramaribo they sing:

> "*We want to see the vodu in our yard,*
> *We want to see them, brother.*"

W

waka, to travel. This word is from the English "walk."

waka bon, yere!, literally, "walk well, hear!" The word "*yere*" is not only used in the same sense as in the South, but with the same inflection.

waka koni, *koni* means carefully or with cunning, hence, "go with care." The word *konikoni* in Suriname means rabbit and suggests strongly a connection with Br'er Rabbit's name of "Cunny Rabbit."

wisi, black magic, poison. In Dahomey the expression "to poison a man" means as often to use black magic against him as actually to kill him by the use of poison, and this is also true of Suriname.

womi, man. This is from the Portuguese *homem*.

womi-ku-maye, man and woman. This is a term used generically for symbols of procreation which appear on carvings. *Cf. womi, maye.*

wosu, house.

dede-wosu, house of mourning. *Cf. dede.*

liba-wosu, a house of more than one story. Few two-story houses are known in the bush, and those appear on the upper river.

Y

yahai, indeed, yes.

yank'o, buzzard. In the Saramacca country it is considered one of the buzzard's "strong" names. In Jamaica and other British West Indian Islands variants of this word are associated with the name of the buzzard. The derivation usually claimed is that it is a corruption of the English "carrion crow." It is possible that the famous "John Canoe" dances can also be associated with the ancient dances to the buzzard, and this supposition is made more likely

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GLOSSARY AND LINGUISTIC NOTES

when one hears a Jamaican pronounce this phrase. On the Gold Coast there is a play given by the women called *ayendro* in which there are dancing and ritual extravaganza in word play, mimicry, and general ridicule. It seems quite likely that our own "Jim Crow" is derived from this term. Other pronunciations of this term are *yandoro, yandowe,* and *yandoso.* See also *awag'e, apete.* 10A

yeabo, no translation of this word was given us in Suriname; it is, however, the Yoruban for white man.

yorka, spirit of one who has died, ghost.

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